

# A History of India

K. Antonova, G. Bongard-Levin, G. Kotovsky

## BOOK 1



Progress Publishers • Moscow



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*In Two Books*

BOOK

1



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## Preface

India is a cradle of human civilisation. Its culture is closely linked with that of many other peoples and has exerted a significant influence upon their development. Despite centuries of this mutual enrichment India has maintained its original and striking individuality. The achievements of ancient and medieval India in science, literature and art over thousands of years have inspired the creative thought of nations far and wide. Hinduism and Buddhism, that originated in India, and other religious and philosophical teachings which evolved on this foundation, were to influence not merely the development of many Eastern civilisations, but also social thought in many other parts of the world.

Despite colonial oppression, which lasted for close on two hundred years, the people of India succeeded in upholding the traditions of their cultural heritage, distinguished in particular by the lofty ideals of humanism and a profound love of peace. In more recent times the culture and science of contemporary India have been developing on the basis of an original synthesis of Indian cultural traditions and the democratic principles of European culture.

The outstanding Indian writer, musician and teacher Rabindranath Tagore was and is held dear by the whole of the human race.

The history of India in the last several hundred years is that of a long and heroic struggle waged by several generations in the name of liberation from colonial and feudal oppression. The names of outstanding thinkers and politicians who headed the triumphant advance of the national revolution—Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru—stand out in the ranks of those who fought for India's freedom.

India's emergence as an independent nation in 1947 marked a new era in the history of its people. The country was then faced by a task of historic proportions: it had to overcome the survivals of its colonial past and choose a path leading into the future. The historical evolution of modern India is for the most part characterised by steady economic, social, political and cultural progress that is paving the way for profound change in the destiny of this great country.

Scientific analysis of the history and culture of India began at the end of the 18th century, when Europe once again "discovered" India. Since then a variety of schools and trends have grown up in Indology. Many works on India written by West European scholars are too Europe-orientated and various chapters of Indian history are approached in the same way as phenomena of European culture or ancient civilisations closer and more familiar to Europe.

In India itself great interest was shown in the study of the country's history and culture at the turn of the century, as the movement for national independence gained ground. Indian scholars made tremendous strides in the study of their country's history at this time, subjecting to scientific analysis many interesting works of literature and historical source materials. It was they who for the first time presented the history of modern India as the history of a struggle for independence.

An important contribution to this work was made by Russian Indologists. Prominent among them were I. Minayev, F. Shcherbatskoy, and S. Oldenburg, whose works constitute examples of outstanding scholarship. The Indologists of the Russian school have always shown deep respect for the cultural heritage of the peoples of India, and adopted an objective, strictly scientific approach to their study of the country's history and culture.

After the October Revolution of 1917 a Marxist school of Indology grew up: prominent scholars at the early stages included I. Reisner, V. Balabushevich, A. Dyakov, A. Osipov and N. Goldberg.

The interest shown in India grows from year to year in the Soviet Union. This can be accounted for both by the role which India played and continues to play in the world's historical development, and also by the broad political, economic and cultural ties which have grown up between the USSR and India. A deep affection for the peoples of India and a sense of international solidarity lead Soviet men and women to acquaint themselves in detail with India past and present. In the last ten years alone a large number of academic and general works on India's history and culture have appeared and many works by Indian writers have been translated into Russian.

Soviet historians compiled and published a four-volume *History of India* in 1959-1969 which was well received in the country concerned. This work, some of whose authors and editors have contributed to the present study as well, has been drawn on for this new *History of India* in two books. At the same time use has also been made of the latest research into Indian history carried out by scholars from both the Soviet Union and many other countries.

It is hoped that this book will provide the reader with a deeper knowledge of India and the history and culture of its peoples, and thus promote friendly relations between India and the Soviet Union.

The authors of this work are as follows: G. Bongard-Levin (Part I), K. Antonova (Part II and Part III as far as the section entitled "India during the Transition to Imperialism") and G. Kotovsky (the remainder of Part III and Part IV).

# Ancient India

G. Bongard-Levin





## **THE BEGINNINGS**

### **INDIA IN THE STONE AGE**

#### **Paleolithic Sites**

One of the world's most ancient civilisations emerged in India: it was here that a highly advanced culture took shape that was to exert a tremendous influence on the subsequent development of the country and the cultures of many peoples of the Orient, Central and South-East Asia and the Far East. Archeological finds show that India was inhabited from the very earliest times.

Stone tools dating from the Lower Paleolithic period have been found in many parts of the country. Independently of each other two centres of Lower Paleolithic culture emerged: to the north the Soan culture (along the Soan River, present-day Pakistan), and to the south, in the Deccan, the so-called Madrasian culture. These paleolithic sites were in river valleys providing more favourable conditions for human life. The first of these sites to be discovered was in the Madras area in 1863, and for this reason tools typical of the Lower Paleolithic period in Southern India, namely hand axes, came to be known as Madras axes. Quite different tools were found in Lower Paleolithic sites in the north of the country, massive pebble cutting tools, referred to as choppers. Paleolithic implements have also been found in other regions of the country, in Central and Western India, where the Soan and Madras traditions dovetailed as it were. New research has shown that towards the south Madras axes predominate while as we move further north the number of implements of the Soan type increases.

The difference between these types of tools can be accounted for above all by the different natural conditions, by the availability of stone suitable for tool working. It is no accident that the largest number of sites was discovered in caves situated in the river valleys of the Deccan and in the foothills of the mountains of Northern India. The climate in these areas is more propitious and the fauna plentiful. The main occupations practised by the people of that period were hunting and the gathering of edible plants. People lived in large groups; these were indispensable in view of the extremely hard conditions of life at that time.

An important stage in the evolution of human society was the transition to the Upper Paleolithic period, when *Homo sapiens* as we know him today appeared.

In recent years Indian archeologists have unearthed a number of sites dating from the Upper Paleolithic period. Major changes, stemming from the emergence of clan communities, took place at that time.

Anthropologists maintain that during the Upper Paleolithic period representatives of the Negroid race predominated, while during the Mesolithic period Caucasians appeared in the West and Mongoloids in the East. The taming of animals began during the Mesolithic period and its close was marked by the emergence of pottery and the gradual transition to agriculture.

### **The Mesolithic and Neolithic Periods**

The best known site of the Mesolithic period in India is the Langhnaj settlement in Gujarat. Materials unearthed in that settlement shed light on the way of life led by primitive man in the Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods. Excavations have shown that the main tools used at that time were stone blades and microliths of regular geometric shape which were used as arrow-heads.

Archeologists have singled out two distinct periods in the history of Langhnaj. At the end of the first, hand-made pottery appeared, while that dating from the second period (the early Neolithic) was made on a potter's wheel and decorated. During the first period hunting and fishing were the main occupations pursued by the population, while the second was marked by a transition to agriculture.

Bones of deer, antelopes, rhinoceroses, wild boar and bulls have been found in the Langhnaj area.

Mesolithic settlements have been found in other areas of India as well, in the south (near Tinnevely) and in the east (Birbhanpur in West Bengal). These sites have also revealed a large number of microliths in a variety of shapes. Techniques for fashioning microliths were still extant at a later stage, after man had begun to work metal.

As early as the Mesolithic period development in different regions of India was proceeding unevenly. At the beginning of the fourth millennium B.C. the inhabitants of the Mesolithic settlements in the south of India were engaged in hunting and fishing, while in the north, in Sind, communes based on agriculture were rapidly gaining ground. A similar unevenness in development marked the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods which followed.

In the Neolithic period agriculture and animal husbandry developed further and nomadic habits were gradually abandoned in favour of a more settled mode of life. The most advanced Neolithic cultures were those found in Baluchistan and Sind, which as it were anticipated the urban civilisation of the Indus valley.



To judge by the excavations at Kili Ghul Mohammad (in the Quetta valley, part of present-day Pakistan), Neolithic tribes engaged in animal husbandry and grain farming were already in evidence in Northern Baluchistan at the beginning of the fourth millennium B. C. Their dwellings were built of adobe bricks, and they had domesticated animals (sheep and goats). Metals were not yet known and their tools were mainly of stone, incorporating parts of jasper, flint and chalcedony. Later pottery appeared and finally there were the first signs of metal being used. The bones from local breeds of livestock found there during excavations serve as an argument for the point of view that the crops grown in Baluchistan were local in origin. Similar cultures were discovered in Rana Ghundai, in Eastern Baluchistan, which reveal definite similarities with the Neolithic culture of Iran.

Excavations at Damb Sadaat (not far from Kili Ghul Mohammad) revealed a well-defined stratigraphical record of the Neolithic and early Chalcolithic periods. The radiocarbon method has enabled archeologists to date the earliest layer as stemming from the twenty-seventh or twenty-sixth century B. C. The stratum dating from the next period (twenty-sixth to twenty-third centuries B.C.) can be distinguished thanks to terra-cotta figurines, glazed pottery and various copper objects.

Meanwhile in the northern regions such as Kashmir (e.g., the Burzahom settlement near Shrinagar) Neolithic cultures of a more primitive type have been found. Ancient dwellings were located in pits dug in the clayey soil. Hearths were found near the entrances to the pits and the pottery produced was hand-made and of coarse workmanship. A large number of bone harpoons, awls, needles, etc., were unearthed. The main pursuit of the inhabitants was fishing. The transition to land cultivation took place here at a later date, between the nineteenth and seventeenth centuries B. C. By then occasional buildings of clay or adobe bricks are to be found.

The best known Neolithic settlements in the southern part of the country are those unearthed at Sanganakallu (Bellary district) and Piklihal. Traceable to the early Neolithic period are polished stone tools and hand-made pottery, dating approximately from the twenty-first century B.C. By this time sheep and goats had been domesticated and dwellings were built mainly on hills or in small gullies between hills.

The men of the Piklihal settlement were animal breeders and tillers of the land. Enclosures specially designed for livestock have been found there, and dwellings were built of clay and bamboo. Some scholars hold that these settlements were founded by Iranian tribes that had penetrated these areas. However this point of view contradicts existing evidence which points to local traditions.

Two specific zones are to be distinguished among the Neolithic cultures of Eastern India: Bihar-Orissa and Assam. The latter culture

betrays the influence of Neolithic cultures of South-East Asia while local features predominate in the early cultures of Bihar-Orissa.

While Neolithic and early Chalcolithic cultures were developing in Northern, Eastern and Southern India there already existed an advanced urban civilisation of the Bronze Age in the Indus valley.

### **THE HARAPPAN CIVILISATION**

It was at one time commonly held by scholars that civilisation in India had emerged at a late date. Indeed it was assumed by some scholars that civilisation had been brought from outside by Aryan tribes. Frequent mention was made of the isolated nature of ancient Indian culture, and its backwardness in relation to the cultures of other countries of the Ancient East.

The discovery and study of the Harappan civilisation provided striking proof of the ancient and highly original nature of Indian culture. In 1875 the British archeologist Alexander Cunningham discovered in Harappa (the Multan district of the West Punjab in present-day Pakistan) a seal with an unknown inscription, however scientific excavations were only begun in the third decade of this century. Indian archeologists D. R. Sahni and R. D. Banerji unearthed ancient cities in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (in the Larkhana district, Sind, modern Pakistan). Since then this civilisation has provided a subject of vital interest for historians and archeologists of different countries.

### **Theories as to the Origin of the Harappan Civilisation**

One of the most complex questions connected with the study of the Harappan civilisation is that of its origin. Various ideas have been put forward: references to a Sumerian foundation for the Harappan culture, or the founding of the latter by Indo-Aryan tribes, which would have meant that the Harappan civilisation was considered a Vedic civilisation. The eminent archeologist R. Heine-Geldner even maintained that the civilisation of the Indus valley had appeared suddenly, out of the blue as it were, since no traces of earlier development were found in the initial period of excavation. In recent years important new materials relating to the local origin of that culture have been collected. Unfortunately subterranean streams have so far prevented archeologists from investigating the lowest strata at Mohenjo-Daro.

Excavations in Baluchistan and Sind have shown that in the fourth and third millennia B.C. there existed cultures there based on farming, which reveal much in common with the early Harappan civilisation, and with which the Harappan settlements maintained contact over a long period (the findings of W. A. Fairservis, B. de Cardi and J. M. Casal). In Sind agriculture emerged later, which gives grounds for the assumption that certain tribes from Baluchistan and Southern Afghanistan had penetrated that far.

It is clear that the Harappan settlements in the Indus valley did not emerge overnight and all at the same time. There evidently was one particular centre where urban culture first developed and from which men gradually moved out to found other settlements farther afield. Of particular interest in this connection is the work of the French archeologist J. M. Casal concerned with the Amri settlement: he established a stratigraphy extending from the pre-Harappan period to the late-Harappan period. Here one can trace the local development of the various cultures: from the time when most of the pottery was hand-made, without the potter's wheel, when buildings and the use of metal were rare, up until more advanced stages distinguished by decorated pottery and more durable buildings of unburnt brick. The lower strata of the pre-Harappan period reveal similarities with the early cultures based on agriculture of Baluchistan, and in the later strata pottery is found dating from the early Harappan settlements of the Indus valley. Finally excavations showed that the traditions typical for the Amri culture coexisted with Harappan traditions.

The question as to the link between the Harappan culture and the earlier Amri culture is the subject of fierce controversy in scientific literature. While A. Ghosh is inclined to accept a genetic relation between the two, J. M. Casal holds that the Harappan culture did not take shape spontaneously in Amri, but rather was gradually "superimposed" on it.

In Harappa itself pottery of the Amri culture was found under the town fortifications, and in the lower strata of Mohenjo-Daro pottery of Baluchistan cultures, which fact clearly shows not only that there were close contacts between the Indus valley settlements and the farming cultures of Baluchistan and Sind, but also that the Harappan civilisation had local roots. It grew up on the agricultural traditions of that region, and above all those of the Indus valley, although it represented a new stage, an urban culture of the Bronze Age.

Excavations carried out by Pakistani archeologists in Kot Diji (not far from modern Haipur) showed that in the pre-Harappan period there existed a rather highly developed culture in the region: scholars unearthed a citadel and regular blocks of dwelling houses. Early pottery from Kot Diji shows similarities with the pottery of the farming settlements in Sind and Baluchistan, and also with pre-Harappan pottery in the Indus valley, while later pottery resembles the Harappan variety. This made it possible to trace the evolution of

local traditions. A period that obviously immediately preceded the Harappan civilisation was discovered by Indian archeologists excavating a site at Kalibangan (Rajasthan), where, on two mounds, settlements of the Harappan people's predecessors were found, and later buildings that were clearly the work of the founders of the Harappan culture themselves. The pottery from the pre-Harappan settlements possesses many features in common with the pottery found at Amri and Kot Diji. This enabled scholars to trace the emergence and development of Harappan culture, and also the coexistence of early Harappan culture and traditions with those of the more mature Harappan period.

In recent years Indian archeologists have discovered many new monuments of Harappan and early Harappan cultures. These have given rise to new theories as to the origin of the Harappan civilisation. In addition to the theory that the Harappan civilisation had evolved from local pre-Harappan and early Harappan cultures, the idea was put forward that early Harappan cultures—cultures of a rural type—and the Harappan civilisation—an urban civilisation—could have existed side by side and followed a parallel course of development. Indeed the emergence of urban life, the appearance of large urban settlements provided the new landmark heralding the birth of the mature Harappan civilisation with all its distinctive characteristics (seals, the art of writing, original pottery decoration, etc.).

The trend towards urbanisation can be traced at many sites dating from the early Harappan period in Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Sind, but it is only in the Indus valley that such an advanced urban civilisation emerged.

Highly significant for this civilisation were of course the geographic conditions of the region, including the network of the Indus and its tributaries, that provided most favourable conditions for the development of material culture and economics, and for the foundation of urban settlements—centres of trade and craftsmanship. It is no mere coincidence that a large number of the Harappan settlements are sited along the banks of the river Indus and its tributaries. Harappan settlements have also been discovered in the upper reaches of the Ganges and the Yamuna (now called the Jumna).

Much still remains to be clarified and elaborated in connection with the origins of the Harappan culture, however the theories which link the emergence of that civilisation with outside influence, such as the Aryan or Sumerian, are now only of interest for the historiographer.

### **Confines and Extent of the Harappan Civilisation**

In the third decade of this century when work first began on the investigation of the Harappan civilisation it was thought that the confines of this culture were relatively narrow. Indeed, initially

Harappan settlements were only found in the Indus valley. Present-day archeological research, however, has revealed that the Harappan civilisation embraced an enormous territory, which stretched for more than 1,100 kilometres from north to south and more than 1,600 kilometres from west to east.

Excavations in the Kathiawar peninsula revealed that the population gradually moved towards the south, settling in new territories. At the present time the most southerly of the Harappan settlements to be discovered are those at the mouth of the river Narbada, but it is possible that the Harappan people penetrated still further south. They also set out towards the east, "annexing" more and more new territories as they went. This meant that certain variations of Harappan culture grew up, although taken all in all it was a uniform culture with well established traditions.

Harappan settlements recently unearthed in Saurashtra and the Kathiawar peninsula have again centred attention on the question as to the reasons behind the penetration by the Harappan people of such distant territories and how they reached them.

Some scholars previously assumed that it was only during the so-called last period of the Indus valley civilisation, when the main urban centres were starting to decline in importance, that the Harappan people started to move south and east, while others put these large-scale "migrations" down to changes in geographical conditions or to invasions from outside. More recently, however, since urban centres of the mature Harappan civilisation (e.g., the urban settlement by the name of Surkotad in Gujarat) have been discovered in Saurashtra, Gujarat and the Kathiawar peninsula, it has emerged that the inhabitants of the towns in the Indus valley must have been moving into new territories in order to find suitable land for the development of their agriculture, trade and crafts. We encounter a natural process of the Harappan civilisation's "expansion".

Historians assume that the Harappan peoples usually moved overland and down rivers (S. R. Rao's theory that they travelled by sea holds little weight). Excavations in the Kathiawar peninsula have revealed cross influences between the Harappan culture and local cultures of a Chalcolithic nature.

We can thus assume that variations within this enormous civilisation reflected the presence of a number of different ethnic groups and the uneven levels of development to be found in those regions where the founders of the Harappan civilisation appeared.

### **Chronology**

Scholars are now able to date the Harappan civilisation with reference to various pieces of evidence. Firstly, by comparing relics found in the Indus valley and Mesopotamia (for instance seals

with inscriptions in the Indus valley characters found in towns between the Tigrus and the Euphrates), by spectral analysis of pottery, by the carbon-14 method used in recent years and also by reference to Accadian source materials relating to trade relations with the Orient. Initially scholars placed the Harappan culture too far back in time, basing their conjectures on general deductions concerning similarities in the development of civilisations in Sumer and India. Sir John Marshall, a leading British archeologist and one of the fathers of "Indian archeology", dated the Indus valley civilisation at 3250-2750 B. C. Later, after seals of the Indus valley type had been discovered during excavations in the cities of ancient Mesopotamia, it emerged that the majority of them were associated with the reign of Sargon (2316-2261 B. C.) and also with the Isin period (2017-1794 B.C.) and the Larsa period (2025-1763 B. C.). These findings led scholars to conclude that the closest ties between Mesopotamia and India could be dated between the twenty-fourth and eighteenth centuries B. C.

It is revealing to note that in Accadian records the largest number of references to trade with Eastern regions, including trade with Dilmun and Meluhha, which scholars identify with the Indus region or neighbouring ones, is found in the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur (2118-2007 B.C.) and the dynasty of Larsa. Great interest was aroused when an imprint of an Indus valley type seal was discovered on one of the cuneiform tablets dated the tenth year of the reign of King Gungunuma of Larsa (1923 B. C.). All these data lend weight to the assumption that the flowering of the towns in the Indus valley falls towards the end of the third and the beginning of the second millennium B.C. When the towns of Mesopotamia were being excavated, seals from the Indus valley were also found in strata relating to the Kassite period, which would indicate that contacts continued during that stage. In the upper layers of Harappan sites faience beads have been found which spectral analysis has revealed to be of the same kind as similar beads found on the island of Crete at Knossos (sixteenth century B. C.). This makes it possible to date the last period of the history of the Harappan civilisation as the sixteenth century B. C.

Carbon-14 dating has necessitated certain amendments to this time-scale. It has enabled scholars to date the early layers of Harappan culture at Kalibangan as stemming from the twenty-second century B. C. and the last is now said to embrace the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries B. C. Findings at the Mohenjo-Daro site point to similar dates: the heyday of that civilisation was between the twenty-second and nineteenth centuries B. C. and it may have lasted as late as the eighteenth century B. C. ( $\pm 115$  years).

Not long ago another means of dating was devised, namely dendrochronology. Dates arrived at by this method with regard to the Harappan settlements again bring scholars round to the theory that

the Indus valley civilisation should perhaps be set further back in time.

When attempting to assess the age of the Indus valley civilisation it is essential to bear in mind the considerable range in time of the existence of towns and settlements in the various regions concerned. Excavations in the Kathiawar peninsula for example have shown that, even after the decline of the main centres in the Indus valley, towns of the Harappan culture still continued to exist there albeit in somewhat modified form. New archeological finds made by Indian scholars in the Punjab and Hariyana bear evidence to the later Harappan settlements in the "eastern" periphery of the Harappan civilisation.

### **The City and Its Features**

The existence of large cities and a carefully defined system of town planning and architecture point to the high level of development attained by the Harappan civilisation.

Archeologists have discovered a number of major cities of this civilisation, of which the largest are Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.

Mohenjo-Daro occupied an area of approximately two and a half square kilometres, and its population has been estimated at 35,000 (although some scholars have come forward with larger figures, ranging as high as a hundred thousand).

To judge by these excavations the urban centres of the Harappan civilisation were all based on a similar plan. The large cities consisted of two principal parts: citadels where the city's authorities would reside and the so-called lower city where dwelling houses were concentrated. This latter part of the city was usually built in the form of a rectangle. The citadel would be built on a high brick platform raised up above the rest of the city. This platform also provided protection against flooding, one of the most dreaded natural disasters that used to befall the cities of the Indus valley. Contacts between the two parts of the city were evidently of a limited scope. In Kalibangan, for example, excavations revealed that there were only two entrances linking the citadel with the "lower city". If necessary these points of access could presumably be cut off and thus the city authorities would be isolated from the rank and file. In Surkotad the citadel was separated from the "lower city" by a fortified rampart.

At the edge of the citadel in Harappa a special processional highway had been laid out, along which troops evidently marched or various processions advanced. The citadel was well fortified with thick walls and towers. Excavations at Kalibangan revealed a massive brick wall forming the citadel's outer defences, inside which were buildings of religious and, apparently, administrative functions. In the citadel at Mohenjo-Daro an enormous water-tank was found (width, 7 metres;

length, 12 metres; depth, almost 2.5 metres) which was possibly part of a religious edifice and used for special ritual ablutions. A special plumbing system ensured a constant flow of fresh water from the well into this water-tank. Not far from the water-tank stood public granaries and a pillared hall that would have probably served for purposes of assembly (or as a market-place in the opinion of certain scholars): only the bases of the pillars have been preserved for the actual pillars themselves were evidently made of wood.

In Harappa as well public granaries were found, to the north of the actual citadel, near the river. The presence of special stone platforms next to the granaries would indicate that grain was also threshed there: archeologists found ears of wheat and barley in the cracks in the floor. Grain was probably brought to the city along the river on boats and then stored in the barns.

The ordinary residential quarters constituting the "lower city" were also built in accordance with a strictly defined plan. There were main streets to be seen, which in Mohenjo-Daro were up to ten metres wide. These intersected at right angles with smaller streets that were sometimes so narrow that not even a cart could pass.

The houses varied in size. Some even had three storeys (this can be deduced from the remains of staircases) and flat roofs. These were clearly the houses of well-to-do citizens. Windows as such were not provided, and light and air penetrated the houses through small apertures made near the top of the wall. The doors of the houses were made of wood. Besides wood, beaten silt was also used for construction. Each house incorporated special outhouses and a courtyard, where the kitchen would be laid out. In the kitchens were special hearths, and large vessels for storage of grain and oil. Bread used to be baked in special ovens, and small livestock would be kept in these courtyards.

The poor lived in huts or hovels. In Harappa near the walls of the citadel and the threshing platforms two rows of dwellings were unearthed, each of which consisted of a single tiny room. Similar dwellings were also found in Mohenjo-Daro, which appear to have been inhabited by impoverished craftsmen, casual labourers and slaves. Stalls and workshops were also to be found along the city streets.

There also could have been religious buildings in the "lower city". The British archeologist, Mortimer Wheeler, discovered at Mohenjo-Daro a building raised on a massive platform, complete with a staircase leading to a higher floor no longer extant, and fragments of stone sculpture. He concluded that the whole structure must have been a temple.

The main building material was burnt brick, although unburnt brick can also be found. At Kalibangan burnt brick was used mainly for building wells and ablution chambers.



Considerable attention was paid to the cities' water supply and drainage systems. There was a well in almost every house and public wells were built in the streets. The drainage system in the cities of the Indus valley civilisation was one of the most advanced in the Ancient East. In the streets there were special holes into which sewage flowed; then the refuse liquids were carried off to special conduits and these were obviously cleaned out at regular intervals. The conduits were built of brick and roofed in with bricks or stone slabs. In view of the local climatic conditions, the density of the population and the low level of sanitation and hygiene this efficient water supply and drainage system was of vital importance.

A town of an original plan was unearthed at Lothal (Saurashtra) which was not only a trading centre but evidently a port as well. It was surrounded by a stone wall and the dwelling houses were arranged on a special platform in order to protect them in case of flooding. In the east of the settlement there was a shipyard (218×37 metres) which was linked via canals to the river and thence the sea. Excavations revealed traces of one canal over two and a half kilometres in length. The remainder of the town consisted of dwelling houses. The main streets were between four and six metres wide and the narrow side-streets were no more than two metres across. There were craftsmen's workshops lining the main street.

### **Occupations**

Despite the advanced level of urban construction, the majority of the population in the Indus valley at this time lived in rural settlements and was engaged predominantly in tilling the land. The Indus valley was one of the earliest centres of farming in the East. From the earliest times various crops had been cultivated there: to judge by archeologists' findings the Harappan peoples were familiar with the cultivation of wheat (two varieties), barley, sesame and beans. No rice grains were found in the Indus valley settlements, but in the clay stratum and in pottery fragments at Lothal and Rangpur (in Saurashtra) rice husks were found. This gives us reason to assume that the people of those regions cultivated rice. During excavations at Mohenjo-Daro a small piece of cotton fabric was found which clearly points to the fact that cotton was grown at that time. Horticulture was also practised. The cultivators of that period made skilful use of the floodings of the Indus and possibly employed irrigation. In the opinion of certain scholars (e.g., D.D. Kosambi) ploughs were not known, and the land was worked with a light harrow.

However when pre-Harappan strata were being excavated in Kalibangan fragments of harrows were found and this points to the use of ploughs even by pre-Harappan peoples. There is thus little

doubt that the Harappans made use of this extremely important agricultural implement.

Livestock farming was also of importance. The domestic animals kept in the Indus valley included sheep, goats, cows, and dogs. Chickens were also raised. It would also appear that elephants were tamed. As yet there is no direct evidence to the fact that horses were known, although this question is currently being investigated.

Copper and bronze were the main metals used to make tools, vessels, weapons, and other articles. The techniques of smelting, casting and forging were already being used at this period. Analysis of metal articles has revealed the incorporation of small quantities of nickel and arsenic. Metal figurines were made by the so-called *cire perdue* (lost wax) method.

Meanwhile stone did not lose its importance and many implements and ornaments were fashioned from it; however, no traces of iron were found in the settlements of the Indus valley civilisation. Iron was to appear at a later stage of Indian history.

The jewellers of this period also worked in silver and gold. Rich ornament clearly enjoyed great popularity among noble citizens.

Crafts such as spinning and weaving became widespread during the period of the Harappan civilisation, and likewise carving in bone and engraving on metal, and pottery. Spinning wheels were found in many houses during excavation work. The pottery of the period was richly decorated, mainly with geometrical or plant patterns. Bowls and dishes were made on a potter's wheel and baked in special kilns. Glazed pottery was also produced.

### **Political Organisation and Social Structure**

The political organisation of the Indus valley civilisation is still a subject of controversy among scholars. The discovery of citadels in Mohenjo Daro, Harappa, Kalibangan and other cities justifies suppositions of class stratification. In the light of data unearthed so far, certain scholars have inadequate grounds for their contention that the society of the Indus valley civilisation was of a pre-class character.

The citadel in these cities most likely provided the headquarters for the ruler (or rulers), and his palace; it also provided the focal point of city administration, which also controlled the complex system of urban water supply and drainage. It is more than likely that these organs of municipal authority were responsible for the public granaries as well. There evidently existed a special city council. It is possible that the members of that council used to meet in a so-called conference hall, as the one unearthed at the Mohenjo-Daro site.

Excavations carried out by Indian archeologists in Kalibangan have revealed interesting finds. It was not only the citadel, but the "lower

town" too that was enclosed by a wall and fortified. The citadel in Kalibangan consisted of two parts—the northern and southern. The former included dwelling houses, but there were none in the citadel's southern part, where several large platforms made of adobe brick were discovered. At the "apex" of one of these platforms remnants of altars were found. This gave reason for some Indian scholars (B. B. Lal, for instance) to assume that the southern part of the citadel was a special religious complex and not the residence of the ruler. In this case the dwelling houses in the northern part of the citadel may have been the living residence of the priests.

As noted earlier the two largest cities were Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, and they are seen by some scholars as two capitals of either a single political unit or two separate ones. The question as to the focal point and methods of the administration for the numerous settlements over the extensive territory concerned has still to be answered: significant in this context is the existence of a single system of weights and measures, one system of writing, close similarities in urban layout and building techniques, etc.

A subject that remains very controversial is the nature of political power in the Harappan cities and that of the overall class structure of this civilisation. Certain scholars (such as V.V. Struve from the USSR and W. Ruben from the GDR) put forward the hypothesis that the Harappan civilisation was based on patterns of slave-ownership. However, as yet the data and evidence in support of this theory are inadequate. Other scholars have compared its political organisation with that of ancient Mesopotamia assuming that power in the Indus valley was also wielded by priests, who were in possession of all the land. It is also possible that the form of power in the Harappan cities was of a republican, oligarchical variety.

Excavations have brought to light a marked inequality with regard to property. The large houses were clearly inhabited by well-to-do citizens, evidently traders or prosperous artisans, while the poor were obliged to take shelter in tiny dwellings. Striking differences in the extent of property are reflected in burial practices. Wealthy citizens were interred with jewellery and decorated vessels. The burial accoutrements of the poor were on a far more modest scale. Scholars assume that there were slaves in the Harappan cities, who lived in hovels and threshed grain, carried heavy loads and possibly assisted with the cleaning out of the drainage system. In Harappa, beyond the walls of the citadel, in close proximity to the public granaries and next to the platforms for threshing grain, mean dwellings were found that must clearly have been inhabited by bonded workmen or slaves. In Kalibangan and Lothal no such dwellings were found which led scholars (such as the French archeologist J. M. Casal) to conclude that the power structure in those cities was of a more liberal nature than the authoritarian regime that held sway in Harappa. Again evidence is inconclusive, although it would seem likely that

political organisation did vary from one Harappan city to another. An interesting viewpoint is that put forward by the British scholar D. H. Gordon who suggests that certain of the terra-cottas should be viewed as figures of slaves (they depict men and women squatting with their arms folded round their knees and wearing round caps on their heads). Further Casal singled out a collection of tiny seals bearing a very simple and brief "text" as "identity cards" for workmen or slaves.

Taken all in all excavation findings point to the existence of a number of social groups such as the priesthood, the merchants, artisans, and bonded workmen; there must also have existed a distinct group of military. This stratification led some scholars to regard the Harappan civilisation as a varna type of social structure in embryo.

### **Trade and External Relations**

The cities of the Harappan civilisation were centres of domestic and foreign trade. Foreign trade was carried on both by sea and land routes. During excavations at Mohenjo-Daro a toy model of a two-wheeled cart was found. Such carts must have been used for transporting goods within the confines of the Indus valley. Trade links were established between the Harappan cities and parts of Southern India, whence precious metals were obtained. More recently it has been established that there existed trade links between the cities of the Harappan civilisation and the settlements of Southern Turkmenia (viz. findings made by V. M. Masson at Altyn-tepe).

The discovery of seals, beads, shells and other typically Harappan articles in the cities of Mesopotamia, and also that of Mesopotamian-type seals in the cities of the Indus valley point to the existence of close trade links between the Indus valley and Sumer. During excavations in Sumer a piece of fabric was discovered which bore the imprint of a Harappan seal. Trade contacts with Sumer appear to have been effected overseas by way of Bahrein, where articles reminiscent of Harappan wares have been found. Findings in Lothal also point to the wide scale of overseas trade. Excavations there unearthed a large wharf, docking berths for ships and stone anchors. Ships are depicted on some of the seals and terra-cottas found at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, while in Lothal archeologists were fortunate enough to find a terracotta model of a vessel complete with a depression apparently designed for the insertion of a mast.

Also in Lothal was found a round seal resembling others found in Bahrein and the cities of Mesopotamia.

In Accadian sources there are references to voyages undertaken by merchants across the sea to the countries of Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha.

Some scholars equate Dilmun with Bahrein, referred to earlier, while others interpret the name as a designation for certain areas within the Harappan civilisation. Magan is sometimes sited within Baluchistan, while Meluhha is even equated with Mohenjo-Daro or the settlement on the west coast of India. The question as to the actual identity of these place-names remains to be solved, while the existence of trade and cultural links between the Harappan cities and Mesopotamia is incontestable.

## **Religion**

Archeological findings provide us with some idea of the religious views entertained by the people of the Harappan civilisation. Both within the citadel and the residential areas of the cities edifices have been found which scholars have ample grounds for regarding as temples. There are evidently links between these temples and ritual bathing pools, and also stone figures found in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. In the view of a whole number of scholars the temples and certain of the stone figures were dedicated to a male divinity who is compared with proto-Shiva. One of the seals that have been found, depicts a three-faced divinity sitting in a distinctive "yoga" position on a low pedestal, to which are adjoined as it were small figures of antelopes. The hair of the divinity is arranged in such a way as to form horns. Wild animals are standing at each side of him. When Sir John Marshall was directing his excavations he concluded that this divinity was Shiva-Pashupati, i. e., Shiva as the patron and protector of cattle. It is worth noting that in early Hindu texts Shiva is referred to as yogin, as the god with his hair arranged in horns. This interpretation, now supported by various other scholars, may point to a link between Hinduism and the religious concepts common among the people of the Harappan civilisation. Another fact which appears to bear out this theory is the depiction on seals of animals such as bulls, tigers and others. According to Hindu beliefs gods were associated with specific animals: Shiva with the bull (Nandin) and his consort, the goddess Parvati, with a tiger. It is likely that this depiction of various animals was a vestige of totemistic concepts and that certain animals were the totems of various tribal groups.

In recent times certain scholars (including A. Ghosh) have questioned the assumption that Harappan traditions might have exerted some kind of influence on ancient India's subsequent historical and cultural development, and rejected the idea that the three-faced divinity was a "Hindu" prototype.

To judge by the seals that have been preserved the rites of fire-, water- and tree-worship were practised. In Lothal and Kalibangan fragments of altars have been found.

Historians have made a detailed study of the Harappan seals, and this has enabled them to single out certain of the Harappan people's cosmographic concepts. Many of these concepts reveal direct parallels with the religious ideas of Hinduism.

Of particular interest are the parallels with certain Sumerian subjects, in particular the episodes from the well-known legend of Gilgamesh. However on the Harappan seal in question the hero is bridling tigers, not lions.

A large number of terra-cotta figurines depicting women have been found which points to a cult of a Mother goddess.

Many of the ideas put forward with regard to the religion of the Harappans and the development of their culture are to a large extent mere hypotheses, the viability of which will be verified when scholars succeed in deciphering the Indus script. Yet even now it would be hardly possible to deny that the traditions of the Harappan civilisation exerted a definite influence on the development of Vedic tribes.

### **Language and Script**

Unfortunately the script of the Harappan civilisation has yet to be deciphered, but the very fact of its existence points to the high level of that culture's development. So far over a thousand seals with inscriptions have been unearthed, and in addition inscriptions have been found on pottery and objects fashioned in metal. Scholars are of the opinion that these seals could be receipts for merchandise or amulets, since there are small holes in some of them. It is possible that these inscriptions were made not only on seals but also on materials that were easier to write on, such as palm leaves. The latter would have been extremely perishable and this would explain why they have not been preserved. In view of this the discovery of a clay inkwell was of particular interest.

The total number of characters to be found on the seals comes to almost 400. Scholars have established that they were phonetic signs for the main part, though some were ideographs. The inscriptions are relatively brief. Special strokes were used to indicate numbers. In Kalibangan a fragment of pottery was found which made it perfectly clear that the writing was done from right to left.

For several decades now scholars have been trying to decipher this writing. A variety of theories have been put forward. A well-known scholar Bedrich Hrozný linked the Harappan script with the Hittite hieroglyphic script, although this line of investigation did not bear any results. In order to decipher the inscriptions it is essential first to determine the language which the inhabitants of the Indus valley spoke and wrote. Many well-known scholars (including T. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau) regard it as belonging to the Dravidian (proto-Dravidian) group of languages.

A similar conclusion was reached by scholars who analysed the Harappan "texts" with the help of computers (Soviet and Finnish researchers independently of each other carried on this work). They hold that the proto-Indian language (the language of the Harappan "texts") could be regarded as one of the Dravidian group, bearing in mind that this does not imply the contemporary Dravidian languages of India but a proto-Dravidian language, a reconstruction of which is now being successfully done by specialists in this particular field. Deciphering the Harappan characters would be possible if a bilingual were found—an inscription containing two versions of a text in two separate languages. If we bear in mind data already gleaned from archeological excavations that point to the close ties between the cities of the Harappan civilisation and Mesopotamia, there are grounds for hoping that such an inscription will be found.

### **The Decline of the Indus Cities**

Recent excavations have shed new light on the Harappan civilisation that need now no longer be regarded as inflexible and stagnant. Investigation into the internal development of Harappan culture has revealed a number of distinct periods in the life of its cities. After their heyday there followed a period of decline. This emerges particularly clearly from the evidence unearthed at Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, Kalibangan, etc. During the so-called later period construction work at Mohenjo-Daro was carried out without any strict plan, and by that time some large public buildings were already in ruins and in their place small ones appeared. The water supply system had also fallen into disrepair by this time. Many structures in Harappa were also in a state of ruin. The active trading of the earlier period was also on the decline. Techniques used for the production of pottery also changed, less ornament was used than before and its execution was of a poorer quality.

The question as to why the Harappan cities entered a period of decline is the subject of fierce controversy among the experts. For a long time the most popular explanation was that the immediate cause of the demise of the Harappan cities and that whole civilisation was the invasion of Aryan tribes. However, more recent investigations have shown that a number of cities had gone into decline before any foreign tribes appeared, namely as a result of internal factors. Among these local causes salination of the soil, flooding, encroachment of the Rajputana desert and changes in the course of the river Indus were suggested.

After hydrological research in the Mohenjo-Daro area scholars came to the conclusion that not far away from that city long ago there had been the epicentre of a tectonic disturbance that had caused the city to perish. Other specialists maintain that floods were the main

cause for the destruction of Mohenjo-Daro. The city was inundated on several occasions and eventually the inhabitants were obliged to leave the city and move elsewhere. It is possible that a number of other cities also suffered from floods. Recently another theory was put forward to explain the demise of Mohenjo-Daro: the change in the course of the Indus River led to severe drought which impoverished the city and made it easier for foreign invaders to seize it.

All these theories are connected with specific settlements or cities; they do not explain why in the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries B.C. the Harappan civilisation went into decline. It is possible that major changes in Harappan society stemmed from a perceptible barbarisation of this culture resulting from rapid extension of its territory and the inclusion of areas backward in development. This subject requires further investigation but it is already clear that it was precisely internal phenomena which were the main reason for the demise of the Harappan civilisation and the decline of its cities.

It is revealing to note that a similar decline is also to be observed in the outlying areas of the Indus valley civilisation, such as the Kathiawar peninsula. In Lothal the first signs of this decline can be traced as far back as the nineteenth century B.C., and over the next two centuries ties between this large port and the major cities in the Indus valley, beset then by internal crises, weaken and finally disappear. After the so-called Harappan period in the Kathiawar peninsula there follows a new, post-Harappan period, during which the local culture is modified to some extent, although there is no disruption of the continuity of its development. Excavations have shown that in this area the decline of Harappan culture is in no way linked with invaders from outside, as may well be the case in the Indus valley, where the latter period of development for several cities did in fact coincide with the penetration of that region by foreign tribes. Significant in this connection is the thorough-going work on a system of city fortifications built during the latter period to protect Harappa from invasion by foreigners. Traces of holocausts in these cities and the discovery of human bones in the middle of the streets (those of men who evidently had been killed in skirmishes with the enemy) point to conflict between the city people and hostile tribes from outside.

Judging by excavations the tribes which found their way into the Indus valley belonged to a variety of ethnic groups. They included tribes from Baluchistan and others bearing close similarity to the tribes of Iran. Some groups of tribes did not differ from the Harappan peoples in the ethnic respect and lived in the immediate neighbourhood of the Harappan cities. The foreign tribes which attacked the Harappan cities were not large in number. Sometimes traces of a particular tribe can only be found in one Harappan settlement. Yet at the same time it would be true to say that these invaders took the decline of the main centres of Harappan civilisation to its logical



conclusion. It is possible that some of these tribes could be classified as Indo-Aryan, but taken as a whole the traditional theory to the effect that the decline of the Harappan civilisation can be directly attributed to the coming of the Aryans should be fundamentally reconsidered, although this in no way contradicts the actual fact of the penetration of India by Indo-Aryan tribes.

#### **CHALCOLITHIC CULTURES IN CENTRAL, WESTERN AND EASTERN INDIA**

In the heyday of the Indus valley civilisation the use of metal was only in its earliest stages outside the territory where the Harappan civilisation took root. During the Chalcolithic period the uneven development of various parts of India came still more strikingly to the fore.

Archeological findings dating from this period in Central and Western India reflect the influence of developed Harappan traditions: this influence is far less marked in southern and eastern parts of the country.

The area of the Kathiawar peninsula is characterised by a combination of developed Harappan traditions and more archaic features of local neolithic cultures; moreover in the course of time traces of Harappan traditions gradually disappear.

To the northeast of Kathiawar settlements of the so-called Banas culture (called after the river of that name) have been found. The oldest of these distinctive settlements date from 2000 (or 1800) B.C. They are set apart from others of this period by the absence of stone implements (the "stone-blade industry" was a typical feature of Harappan culture in Sind and the post-Harappan culture of Kathiawar) and by the presence of large numbers of copper items. The inhabitants lived in stone and clay dwellings of a rather archaic type. The pottery found there differs from that of the Kathiawar culture. In one of the settlements pertaining to this culture fragments of a platform were found, such as were characteristic of Harappan settlements too.

Research carried out by Indian archeologists in Navdatoli, Nevasa, Nasik and Jorwe gives us an idea of the life led by the ancient inhabitants of Malwa and Maharashtra. In the Chalcolithic period the people of this area were engaged in agriculture and livestock breeding, cultivated wheat, rice and certain types of beans. They kept sheep and goats. In a stratum dating from the thirteenth century B.C. a piece of thread was found which was a mixture of coarse silk and cotton. This shows that they already knew the art of weaving. Just as in the Harappan settlements, large quantities of stone blades were used, and only few copper implements were to be found. Black-and-red wheel-turned pottery is found such as is typical of all Chalcolithic

cultures of that area. Dwellings were made of durable materials and had an outer coating of clay, sometimes huts were built of wood. Excavations at Navdatoli revealed three types of dwellings: round, square and rectangular. They were small in size, the largest being no more than four and a half metres by three. Carbon-14 analysis has shown that the beginning of the Chalcolithic period in this region dates from the seventeenth or the sixteenth century B.C.

Some Harappan influence can be found in more southerly regions in Nasik and Jorwe. Similar types of pottery and metal implements have been found but in general the Harappan influence is far weaker in southern regions. Certain links are to be observed with the Chalcolithic culture of Eastern India. Chalcolithic layers in Jorwe date from the fourteenth to the eleventh century B.C.

The origin of the Chalcolithic culture of Central India and the Deccan is still a subject of controversy among the experts. Theories have been put forward to demonstrate its Iranian origin, or Indo-Aryan influence on that culture. It would appear more probable however that the Chalcolithic culture of Central India evolved from the Neolithic cultures of the region, despite foreign influences. It is likely that the region was inhabited by peoples close to the Harappans as regards ethnic type. It should of course be borne in mind that during the Chalcolithic period extensive parts of India were not yet inhabited and many areas were only inhabited by tribes at a very low stage of development.

In Eastern India a distinct Chalcolithic culture has been singled out by Indian archeologists—the so-called culture of Copper Hoards and Ochre-Coloured Ware. The founders of this culture were farmers for whom however the occupations of hunting and fishing still played a significant role. They produced a wide variety of copper tools: flat axes, chisels, adzes and harpoons. Different theories have been put forward as to the origins of the founders of this culture. Some scholars support the theory that tribes from Central India migrated in an easterly direction, others that the roots of the culture were Harappan, while the well-known archeologist R. Heine-Geldner held that the founders of this Copper-Hoard culture were Aryan tribes.

However recent investigations in India can be seen to link the Copper-Hoard culture more and more conclusively with the forebears of the Munda tribes. The Copper-Hoard culture of the Ganges-Yamuna basin in the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C. gave way in many settlements to the Painted-Grey Ware culture. In a number of other regions the Copper-Hoard culture was of far longer duration, and it was not until much later that it came into contact with developed cultures.

In recent years new Chalcolithic finds have been made in Eastern India that bear no resemblance to the Copper-Hoard culture. In Chirand (Northern Bihar), for instance the Chalcolithic culture (characterised by black-and-red ware) follows on directly from the

local Neolithic culture. It is interesting to note that the black-and-red ware from Chirand bears resemblance to the Chalcolithic pottery of Western and Central India. Carbon-14 analysis dates the late-Chalcolithic layers at Chirand as eighth century B.C. Soon afterwards iron and the so-called northern black polished ware appeared in this region.

Taken all in all, the ethnic diversity and unevenness of development found in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods were to exert a conspicuous influence on the subsequent course of the country's historical, cultural and social development.

## THE INDO-ARYANS AND THE GANGES VALLEY CIVILISATION

### "The Aryan Question"

For many decades scholars have disputed the "Aryan question", trying to decide when, whence and how the Indo-Aryan tribes came to India. The question as to the original homeland of the Aryans is also a subject of controversy.

Some scholars see the entry of the Aryans as the subjugation of backward aborigines by highly advanced Aryans, who brought civilisation to India and set up an advanced society there. Interpretations based on the race theory have stressed the racial differences, which supposedly existed between the "racially genuine" Aryans and the peoples of India, and completely rejected the possibility of any independent development and progress on the part of the local population. According to these anti-scientific theories it was only after the appearance of the Aryans that a highly developed society emerged in India and a civilisation took shape.

The discovery of an advanced civilisation in the Indus valley forced many scholars to review their earlier ideas, but echoes of these outdated "theories" are still to be found today. The only peoples who can be classified as Aryans are the ancient Iranians and the ancient Indo-Aryans, who referred to themselves as Aryans and the regions in which they lived as the "lands of the Aryans". The actual word Aryan comes from *ari*, which in the Vedic period meant "foreigner" or "stranger", while *arya* meant "connected with newcomers" or "favourably disposed towards newcomers", and later "a man of noble descent".

Studies based on comparative linguistics and the findings of other sciences have shown that there was a time when the ancient Iranians and the ancient Indians did live together, constituting the so-called Indo-Iranian community. This is borne out, for example, by the close parallels in the languages of the two peoples and their literary heritage (the *Avesta* of the ancient Iranians, and the *Rig-Veda* of the ancient

Indians), the similarity of their religious beliefs and many of their ancient social institutions. The original homeland of the Aryans, or the territory inhabited by the ancestors of the Iranians and Indians, is held by some scholars to be Central Asia and by others to be the steppes of Southern Russia. Nor is there agreement over the routes taken by the ancestors of the Iranians to Iran and the ancestors of the Indians to India. It is quite possible that this lengthy migration proceeded by two or more routes and consisted of several waves.

Unfortunately, another question that still remains to be answered is which part of India was first penetrated by the Indo-Aryans. The written texts of the Indo-Aryans that have survived make it clear that they settled in the Eastern Punjab and the upper reaches of the Yamuna and the Ganges. This shows that the Indo-Aryan tribes did not settle in areas that coincided with the main centres of the Harappan civilisation; indeed the chronology revealed through archeological findings shows that there was a considerable gap in time between the decline of the centres of the Indus valley civilisation and the coming of the Indo-Aryans to India. The demise of the Harappan centres in Sind took place several centuries before the penetration of India by the Indo-Aryans.

### **The Rig-Veda and Archeological Evidence**

The earliest Indo-Aryan literary source is the *Rig-Veda* which most modern experts date from the eleventh or tenth century B.C. This date refers to the time when the ancient hymns were first collected together and committed to writing.

Later texts of the Vedic tradition—the later *Samhitas*, *Aranyakas* and *Brahmanas*—date from between the eighth and sixth centuries.

In recent years interesting archeological findings have brought to light concrete evidence on the Indo-Aryans of the Vedic age. Indian archeologists (B. B. Lal, B. K. Thapar, R. S. Gaur, J. P. Joshi) have discovered the Painted-Grey Ware culture, which, as research has shown, extended throughout the Punjab, in the upper reaches of the Yamuna and the Ganges, and the valleys of these rivers (including the area around modern Allahabad), in north-eastern Rajasthan, i.e., which in its entirety embraced the regions settled by the Indo-Aryan tribes during the early Vedic period. Analysis of the geographical data to be found in this collection has helped to pinpoint the area within which the various hymns of the *Rig-Veda* were composed, namely the North-Eastern Punjab. Some scholars commit themselves to a still more specific area—namely the Ambala district.

To judge by the archeological findings made at Atranjikhhera the Painted-Grey Ware culture did not extend beyond the twelfth or eleventh centuries B.C., dates which also coincide with those of the

*Rig-Veda*. This has given scholars grounds for assuming that the Indo-Aryan tribes of the age when the *Rig-Veda* was being composed were associated with the Painted-Grey Ware culture.

Carbon-14 readings made in recent years at other sites (Hastinapura and Noh) have shown that the Painted-Grey Ware culture is a considerably earlier phenomenon, relating to the ninth or eighth centuries B.C. (viz. the work of D.P. Agrawal), which means that the appearance of this culture in the upper reaches of the Ganges-Yamuna area has had to be put forward in time with all the resultant implications. Some scholars have attempted to draw parallels between items of the material culture of the Painted-Grey Ware period and evidence to be gleaned from the later Vedic texts, that is to associate this particular culture with the latter-day Vedic tribes—the Indo-Aryans of the first half of the first millennium B.C. (cf. the work of R.S. Sharma and A. Ghosh).

At present it can be stated that there were several stages of the Painted-Grey Ware culture associated with the Vedic tribes that initially settled in Eastern Punjab and the upper reaches of the Yamuna and the Ganges and then advanced in a southerly direction.

Recent excavations undertaken by Italian and Pakistani archeologists in Swat are of particular interest in this context. In Swat, burial grounds were discovered dating from about the ninth or eighth century B.C. Both grey and red pottery was found there bearing certain resemblance, according to some scholars, to painted-grey ware; occasional items made of iron have also been found. It may be assumed that the burial grounds in Swat belong to a group of Aryan tribes that made their way into India at the end of the second millennium B.C.

In recent years, in the Punjab and Hariyana, settlements were discovered, where the Painted-Grey Ware culture has been found superimposed on levels containing the later Harappan culture. There is thus reason to assume that in this particular area the Harappan culture existed up to the coming of the Indo-Aryan tribes.

New excavations have made it possible to speak more definitely of the material culture of the creators of the Painted-Grey Ware culture. During the first stage (in the Punjab and in the north of Hariyana) the Vedic tribes used copper implements, and only later, moving to the south and the east, did they begin to use iron (*circa* ninth and eighth centuries B.C.).

### **Spreading of Indo-Aryans and Local Cultures**

Data to be gleaned from the Vedic texts and various archeological source materials provide us with a general picture of the eastward advance of the Aryan tribes and their penetration of various regions in

the Ganges valley. This was a lengthy process which spread over several centuries. During this period there were various armed confrontations with local tribes, and also hostilities between the Aryan tribes themselves.

The content of the hymns in the *Rig-Veda* enables us to establish the area inhabited by the ancient Indo-Aryan tribes. The most important river, also a holy one, was the Sarasvati; also mentioned are the Indus (Sindhu), the Gomati and a number of rivers in the Punjab. The name of the river Ganges is only to be encountered once in the *Rig-Veda*, in the tenth part (mandala). There is interesting data with regard to the geographical knowledge of the Rig-Vedic tribes: they were well acquainted with the Himalayas, but appear not to have been familiar with the Vindhya Mountains, for there is no mention of these in the hymns. In later collections of Vedic writings there are numerous references to various parts of Eastern India.

The Indo-Aryans' advance by way of regions covered with thick forest was by no means an easy undertaking. They had to clear large tracts of forest and often burn down the trees and vegetation in their way. An interesting legend has been passed down to us in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*. It tells of the God of Fire (Agni) who burns the land between the river Sarasvati (Eastern Punjab) and the river Sadanira (evidently the river Gandak in Western Bihar), and the ruler Mathava Videgha who advanced east together with the redeeming flame. According to the legend the ruler and his subjects succeeded in occupying lands suitable for habitation even to the east of the river Sadanira. This Vedic tale points to the possible direction of the Indo-Aryans' advance and shows that the Videha area (the northern part of what is today Bihar) was the most easterly area settled by Vedic tribes during the Brahman age.

Naturally the settlement of various areas by the Indo-Aryans did not always follow an identical course, and their interaction with local tribes varied from place to place. It would appear from linguistic and archeological evidence that in the Punjab the Aryans had to deal mainly with Dravidian tribes. Insofar as certain traditions of what had once been an advanced culture still persisted in parts of that region, close contacts were possible between the Aryans and the local population. In some parts of the Eastern Punjab the Aryans did not encounter serious resistance on the part of local tribes and were able to advance fast in a southerly and easterly direction, settling new territories. This in its turn influenced the language of the Vedic tribes. Linguistic analysis of the *Rig-Veda* and other *Samhitas* has revealed that the Dravidian languages exerted a marked influence on Indo-Aryan ones, although their interaction was of short duration.

The interaction of the Indo-Aryans and the Munda tribes inhabiting the eastern part of the country was of a quite different nature. Assimilation in the Ganges valley did not proceed as rapidly;

the Vedic tribes by this time had reached a more advanced stage of development, they themselves were more "Indianised" (they were closely acquainted with the traditions and culture of the local Indian peoples and had absorbed these). Many Munda tribes were driven back into the forests by the Vedic tribes, and the Indo-Aryans did not maintain close links with them, although they were in contact with them for quite a long period. As a result the influence of the Munda languages (the Munda substratum) on the Vedic Sanskrit is less marked.

A similar picture is provided by the archeological evidence relating to that period. In some settlements painted-grey ware, which many scholars associate with the Vedic tribes, is found above a layer with black-and-red ware, characteristic of the Chalcolithic culture of tribes in Central and Western India (who apparently spoke Dravidian languages). Recent excavations in the Punjab and Hariyana, as has already been noted, revealed cross influences between the Painted-Grey Ware culture and the later Harappan culture, whose creators belonged to Dravidian-language tribes. In other settlements the Painted-Grey Ware culture can be seen to have inherited the Copper-Hoard culture, which most probably was that of the ancient Munda tribes of East India. In addition archeologists have found a considerable number of settlements where no link can be traced between the Painted-Grey Ware culture and earlier cultures.

In those areas where the Aryan tribes came across the vestiges of traditions from what had once been advanced cultures, the development of the Aryans themselves proceeded more rapidly, just as their assimilation with the local tribes and their advance eastwards. In those areas, on the other hand, where the Aryans were virtually the "first settlers", more time was necessary to settle the areas and this in its turn slowed up the overall development of the newcomers' culture.

As the Indo-Aryan tribes advanced across Northern India (later they were to move southwards as well), the social and political organisation of the Vedic tribes became more advanced. This was reflected in the Vedic texts: of particular interest in this respect is comparison of the early Vedic *Samhitas* with works composed in the later part of the Vedic age. These changes in the structure of Vedic society had a direct bearing on the nature of the interaction between the Indo-Aryans and the local tribes.

Gradually a new culture emerged, which embraced the achievements of both the Aryan and local tribes and was soon common to a large part of the population of Northern and Eastern India. This culture cannot be regarded as an Indo-Aryan one introduced from outside and only with reserve can it be termed the culture of the Vedic tribes of the *Rig-Veda* age, because it was already a specifically Indian culture of the first millennium B.C.

Archeological evidence shows quite clearly that the Painted-Grey Ware culture gave way to the Northern Black-Polished Ware culture,

which in the main dates from the second half of the first millennium B.C. (between the sixth and second centuries B.C.). The latter culture is in many respects indebted to the traditions of the preceding period, yet was by this time no longer a culture of the Vedic Indo-Aryans, but a culture of the Indian tribes of Northern India: settlements where this culture was found range from the Punjab to the lower reaches of the Ganges. By the middle of the first millennium B.C. the Indo-Aryans had penetrated the main regions of the Ganges valley, almost the whole of Northern India. This point in time can be regarded as the dividing line between the end of the Vedic period proper and the beginning of the next, Magadha-Mauryan period.

### **The Main Occupations of the Vedic Tribes**

The main occupations of the peoples of the Vedic age were agriculture and stock-raising. The advance of agriculture and the transition of the bulk of the population to a settled way of life based on land cultivation were promoted by the emergence of iron-working. Iron was used for various types of production activity. Judging by archeological evidence, iron was to be found in small quantities in Northern India in the eleventh century B.C., but its use became widespread only a good deal later (scholars assume that in the middle reaches of the Ganges valley this had taken place in the seventh century B.C.). It is likely that the authors of the *Rig-Veda* were familiar with iron-working although scholars are still at variance in their views on the words used to designate iron at that time (possibly it was the term *ayas*) in later Vedic texts however the term *shyama* or black *ayas* is already used.

Once they had iron implements it was easier for these peoples to settle the forest regions of the Ganges valley, to work the land and, where necessary, to irrigate their land. Iron also promoted more advanced craftsmanship. The fields had earlier been worked with wooden ploughs and hoes, and crops had been reaped with stone-blade sickles, but now the primitive type of wooden plough was replaced by ploughs fitted with iron shares, an advance which opened up completely new prospects for farming on stony ground. The Vedic texts contain references to various types of agricultural tasks including ploughing, sowing, harvesting and threshing. In the *Rig-Veda* we already find references to "locked" waters and water wheels, which can be used for irrigation purposes. The Vedic *Samhitas* also contain references to special irrigation canals.

The people of this period were also familiar with a large number of cereals, including barley, rice, wheat and beans. (Excavations at settlements of the Painted-Grey Ware culture dating from between the eleventh and ninth centuries B.C. revealed rice and wheat grains.) Wide-scale rice cultivation resulted from the Indo-Aryans' settlement



of most of the Ganges valley. A good number of scholars hold that the Aryans had not cultivated rice before coming to India, and that they learnt the art of its cultivation from local tribes.

As well as agriculture, stock-raising also played an important part in the lives of the Vedic tribes. In the Vedic texts there are numerous references to the fact that man's chief source of wealth lay in his herds. The authors of the Vedic hymns are constantly turning to the gods to request that men should be blessed with cows, and war was seen as an endeavour to acquire more cows. Seizure of livestock was the main cause of conflict between the Vedic tribes. The word *aghnya* (one-who-must-not-be-killed) was often used to designate a cow, which probably reflects a certain sanctification of this animal even by this stage. Special ceremonies were designed to protect livestock and the harvest from various types of disasters. Excavations of the Painted-Grey Ware layer at Hastinapur have unearthed bones of a bull, a goat, a sheep, a pig and a horse.

The forms of transport at this period included carts drawn by oxen and chariots drawn by horses.

The Vedic tribes lived in small fortified settlements, which, as can be seen from archeological excavations in the Ganges valley, have little in common with the large cities of the Harappan civilisation. The towns (or *puras*) which are mentioned in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* were rather more akin to rural centres consisting of small dwellings made of timber or clay mixed with straw and of occasional stone structures, and fortified with earthen ramparts. Such fortifications were clearly far from durable for the hymns contain frequent references to the seizure and destruction of the *puras*. Excavations carried out by Indian scholars at Kaushambi revealed that some of the building techniques and traditions of the Harappan cities could have been known to the Vedic tribes of Eastern India, however they did not exert a decisive influence on the building skills of these tribes. (In recent years some Indian archeologists such as A. Ghosh rule out any knowledge of Harappan building techniques among the Vedic tribes, for the fortifications at Kaushambi are referred to a much later date.)

Archeological findings have also shown that the growth of urban centres in the Ganges valley went hand in hand with the advancement of crafts. In the Vedic texts there are references to a variety of craftsmen—blacksmiths, potters, carpenters, jewellers, armourers, etc. The most highly esteemed skills were those of the carpenter and blacksmith who made agricultural implements and weapons and built houses. Trade developed not only between individual tribes, but also with foreign lands. This was possibly by way of the sea. In the Vedic hymns there are, for example, references to ocean-going vessels with a hundred oars each and also references to the treasures of the sea. It is possible that vessels were also used for travelling up and down rivers. Gradually distinct groups of professional traders emerged.

## **Inequality Stemming from Differences in Property Ownership and Social Status**

In Vedic society there were already differences based on property ownership. Alongside a rich élite in possession of considerable herds, there were also extremely poor strata of the population. References to the rich and the poor appear time and again in the Vedic texts, references to splendid sacrifices and generous gifts made by the first group and to the modest offerings of the simple villagers. In the *Rig-Veda* there are references to the branding of cattle which was clearly carried out in order to show which animals belonged to whom.

In the Vedic writings (particularly those of the later Vedic period) there are details to be found regarding donations and purchases of land, although property rights were to a large extent subject to the "will of the tribe". Cultivated plots were made over to individual members of the tribe, and this step in its turn paved the way for the further development of inequality stemming from differences in property rights or social status. Questions of inheritance became important and land was contested by individuals and by whole tribes. Gradually certain members of the tribal group grew rich and came to constitute a privileged estate in what had once been a united community: they even owned slaves, while at the same time impoverished members of the community lost their independence and became dependent members within their own tribe and village community.

The appearance of slavery is a clear pointer to the development of economic and social inequality. Initially it was prisoners of war who became slaves (the word for slave was taken from *dasyu* or *dasa*, initially meaning enemy), but later some members of the tribe found themselves in a condition of dependence akin to slavery within their own tribe. Some scholars misguidedly assume that the word *dasa* was used to imply tribes which differed ethnically from the Aryans, i.e., they attempt to explain the appearance of slavery not by social factors, but ethnic differences, although there might have been members of autochthonous tribes among the *dasa* slaves. In the *Atharva Veda* there is interesting information to be gleaned concerning the utilisation of female slave labour for grinding grain. In Vedic sources, even in the *Rig-Veda*, there are references to the use of large numbers of slaves (sometimes people are mentioned who owned hundreds or even thousands of slaves), but it is difficult to say to what extent these figures correspond to reality. It would be more logical to assume that we have here an obvious exaggeration, although there is no doubt whatsoever as to the emergence of slavery during the Vedic age.

In view of the overall level of development of the Vedic society that had not yet progressed beyond that of the tribal community the slavery existing at that time (in particular during the *Rig-Veda* period) should be broadly defined as undeveloped, patriarchal.

## Political Organisation

Describing the political organisation of the Vedic tribes is a fairly complex task. This is not only because scholars have little evidence to refer to but also because the tribes of the *Rig-Veda* period and the later Vedic tribes differed considerably in both their types of political organisation and in the levels of historical development as a whole that they had reached.

It is important to approach this question in the context of the overall development of the Vedic tribes, a process which covered a number of centuries and was marked by major changes in economic life and also in social and political structures.

While in the early Vedic period the Aryans were at a stage of tribal organisation, by the later Vedic period and in particular the epic period a class society and a state were emerging.

The Vedic tribes lived in *ganas*, which initially constituted clans or tribal groups, and later units with a class structure. In the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* we find legends describing a past age when the Aryans lived in united harmonious groups, working and offering sacrifices to the gods together and sharing out the fruits of their labours equally among all. The *ganas* were ruled by the *ganapati*.

In the Vedic texts there are direct references to the fact that women were not entitled to be present at meetings of the *gana*, and they appear to have been deprived of all political rights. All questions relating to the internal workings and administration of the commune were decided by the full-fledged members of the community at assemblies known as the *vidatha*, *sabha* or *samiti*.

Scholars are hard put to it to agree on the interpretation of these terms, for the source materials relating to the nature of these tribal assemblies are often extremely contradictory. It is likely that the *vidatha* was the most ancient institution and represented a gathering of tribal elders: unlike the *samiti* it was concerned above all with the deliberation of political affairs. The *samiti* appears to have been a gathering of a broader nature than the *sabha*, but it is difficult to say what exactly its function was.

The people of these tribes lived in *grama*, which consisted of large patriarchal families (*kula*). Clan ties were still very strong, and the influence of the *gotra* made itself felt in all spheres of life. The villages or *grama* had their own administration. Gradually the tribal groups became stratified as inequality based on property and social status took root, and the organs of tribal administration developed into organs of state power; the position of the *ganapati* changed, he ceased to be a tribal leader and became the ruler of a state union.

Here it is interesting to dwell on the ancient Indian legends about the appearance of regal power. According to one of these legends there were no kings at first, and all men were equal and strictly

adhered to accepted moral standards. Later many people started to wallow in pleasures, disrupt law and order, and the strong began to devour the weak. That was the moment when the supreme God Brahma created regal power and the science of punishment.

Another legend tells how men themselves elected a king in order that he might defend them. Regardless of the reasons used to explain the appearance of regal and state power, it is most interesting to note the very acceptance by the ancient Indians of the need for the emergence of state power.

According to early Vedic texts the raja was originally elected by the people who evidently congregated for this purpose at a special assembly. In the *Rig-Veda* and the *Atharva Veda* there are hymns dedicated to the election of kings. One of the lines in a hymn of the *Atharva Veda* reads: "The people has elected Thee to rule." Here as in similar hymns from the *Rig-Veda* the people is referred to by the term *vish*. One of the main functions of the raja was to protect his subjects; he was regarded as the defender of his people.

The formation of the state was a lengthy process, during which vestiges of the former political organisation continued to exist for a long time. The tribal assemblies—especially the *sabha* and *samiti*—continued to play an important part and influenced the appointment of the king. These tribal assemblies were gradually replaced by assemblies of the nobility or the king's retainers. (Later the word *sabha* came to mean the chamber where assemblies took place, and debates and even games were held; it also came to mean a particular kind of legal organ.) The role of the *sabha* and the *samiti* declined as the king's power increased. Organs of state power and permanent state offices gradually emerged. The people had to start paying taxes. *Bali*, which had formerly been a voluntary offering made to the chieftain of a tribe or to a god, now became a compulsory tax strictly laid down for payment to the king through specially appointed officials.

The tribal band of warriors gradually developed into a permanent force headed by a special commander (*senani* or *senapati*). The king and the professional warriors fought on chariots and the freemen of the communities on foot.

Vedic texts provide detailed descriptions of the special ceremony (*rajasuya*) for the consecration of the king, whose person was invested with divinity. The king's chief priest or *purohita* came to play an increasingly important role; he also performed the functions of royal astrologer and adviser. Also of interest is the extant listing of the persons who assisted at the consecration ceremony and were referred to as "king makers". Among them are the *gramani*, which shows that local organs of administration in the village still had a voice in central government. Gradually, elected kingship was replaced by hereditary kingship and power, as a rule, was passed on from father to son. Thus state formations are seen to evolve from the early Vedic *gana*; as a

result of a whole number of conditions these state formations could take the form of monarchies or republics. The territory these states embraced was as yet small. Archaic institutions and features of primitive communal organisation endured for a long period, particularly in peripheral areas.

### **The Origin of Varna. The Caste System**

The existence of castes and the caste system is usually linked exclusively with India, but this conception does not correspond quite precisely with historical and ethnographic evidence. Certain aspects of caste and various elements of the caste system are to be found among many peoples. However India provides the most striking example of the development of the caste system which in the specific conditions pertaining to Indian society has assumed an extremely rigid form.

The very word caste in Portuguese means race or lineage; it was adopted in European languages to designate the rigid groups within Indian society after the Portuguese penetrated India in the sixteenth century and became acquainted with Indian social structure. In India these groups were designated by the Sanskrit term *jati*.

The question as to the origins of caste in India, i. e., this distinctive social institution characterised by strict endogamy and associated with occupation which is restricted and inherited, etc., is the subject of fierce controversy in academic writing. When discussing this problem it is essential to take into account a number of social, economic and ideological factors, and the specific course of ancient India's historical development.

Karl Marx pointed out on several occasions that caste is a vestigial form of tribal organisation. It is precisely in caste that the clan or tribal tie assumes its "extreme, strictest form".

Alongside *jati* there also existed in ancient Indian society another ancient institution, that of social group or *varna*, which emerged in pre-class society, and which later was consolidated and sanctified in class society. Gradually the social groups or *varnas* (Brahmans, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas* and *shudras*) became more and more rigid and came to resemble castes, which explains why the *varna* was often referred to by the term caste.

The question as to the origin of the *varna* is most complex, but it would seem logical to connect the appearance of the social estate, the *varna*, with the break-up of primitive communal relations and the development of inequality based on differences in property ownership and social status.

In the emergence of this specific form of social groups in ancient India a role may well have been played by the specific nature of the social organisation peculiar to the local tribes, whom the Indo-Aryans encountered as they penetrated Northern India.

The warrior élite made up the *varna* of the *kshatriyas*, the priests that of the Brahmins, the freemen of the village communes made up the *varna* of the *vaishyas*, and last came the *varna* of the *shudras* who occupied the lowest position in the social hierarchy. The *varna* had already emerged in the pre-Vedic age. It has been established that in ancient Iran there existed social groups (the Iranian word for these groups—*pishtra*—like *varna* means colour) which corresponded to the first three Indian categories. This would therefore indicate apparently that the division of society into three social estates dates from the Indo-Iranian period, while certain data provide grounds for assuming that this began even earlier.

In the *Rig-Veda* there are numerous references to the first three *varnas* (Brahmins, *kshatriyas* and *vaishyas*), but it is only in the tenth part (*mandala*) that we find the legend explaining the origins of all four *varnas* from *Purusha*. In the hymn *Purusha-sukta* it is written that the Brahmins sprang from the mouth of *Purusha*, the *kshatriyas* from the arms, the *vaishyas* from the thighs and the *shudras* from the feet.

In Vedic literature of the later period this theme recurs frequently but the appearance of *varnas* is associated with the supreme god Brahman. The emergence of the four *varnas* and their status were sanctified by the priests (Brahmins) who went out of their way to substantiate the supremacy of the Brahman group and lend a divine aspect to their status. It is therefore quite understandable that in almost all Vedic texts it is the Brahmins who are named before the other *varnas*. The Brahmins zealously defended their privileges connected with divine worship and the performance of religious rites and their knowledge of religious texts. In practice however the real power was in the hands of the warrior estate, the *kshatriyas*.

As a rule it was representatives of the *kshatriyas* who became kings; the *kshatriyas* stood at the head of state administration and they controlled the vital instrument of power—the army—and held the leading military posts. In the later Vedic texts we already find mention of rivalry between the *kshatriyas* and the Brahmins, and in the epics this struggle is described in considerable detail.

Despite the differences in status, the Brahmins and the *kshatriyas* constituted the privileged and wealthy group, who enjoyed their position at the expense of the working population and bondmen.

The numerically most important *varna* was that of the *vaishyas*, which embraced the freemen from the village communities, the cultivators and merchants. It was the *vaishyas* who paid the bulk of the taxes. In the Vedic age the *vaishyas* still retained certain political rights and even participated in deciding certain affairs of state.

The three higher *varnas* were regarded as the “twice-born” ones, and members of these *varnas* were entitled to *upanayana*, i. e., initiation into Vedic ritual; *shudras* were not twice-born and were therefore excluded from participating in Vedic ritual or studying

sacred texts. The *shudras* as a rule were poor people, economically dependent on those richer than themselves; they provided the lowest categories of artisans and servants. Although the *shudras* were not slaves, they could at any moment find themselves in a position of slave-like dependence. Representatives of the higher groups strove to consolidate the *varnas* as an unassailable hereditary institution, to prevent mixing with representatives of the *shudras* and penetration by the latter of the ranks of the "twice-born".

The fact that there are no references to the *shudras* in the early mandalas of the *Rig-Veda* led some scholars to regard them as native inhabitants, whom the Aryans had subjugated. This was how there emerged the idea of Aryan superiority, their racial purity, of suppression by the Aryans of coloured natives, whom they reduced to *shudra* status. Adherents of this theory emphasised the point that one of the meanings of the word *varna* is colour. However, it should be remembered that the word *varna* is not used to designate skin colour. In ancient India, just as in ancient Iran, there existed a tradition of colour symbolism; a specific colour was associated with each *varna*.

In the latter part of the Vedic age there arose within the *varnas* smaller rigid subdivisions based on occupation which later took the form of castes.

#### THE ANCIENT DYNASTIES AND STATES OF NORTHERN INDIA

In the Vedic writings and in the epics there are references to numerous ancient dynasties and the names of ancient states in the valley of the Ganges; however, the historical reliability of these data is very much open to question and in most cases has not yet been borne out by archeological evidence. The epics contain lists of dynasties that vary from one work to another, and present different accounts of events, all of which complicates the task of the Indologist in his attempt to reconstruct the history of that period. Religious ideas dating from the Vedic and epic periods have brought about a situation where the origins of kings and royal dynasties are explained with reference to the will of the gods. According to the most widespread traditions the main dynasties in the Ganges valley were the Solar and Lunar dynasties whose founders were regarded as descendants of the Sun and Moon gods. The hero of the *Ramayana*, Rama, was associated with the Solar dynasty and the line of the Kauravas was associated with the Lunar dynasty. The king Bharata, whose name is mentioned in the *Rig-Veda*, was traditionally regarded as a descendant of this line.

In the *Rig-Veda* there are certain data relating to political history but the reliability of all these facts is somewhat suspect. The hymns tell for instance of the battle of the ten kings, the clash between the Tritsu tribe (from the Bharata alliance) led by king Sudas and tribes

which were presumably local, non-Aryan in origin, since they are designated as those who do not offer sacrifices. A case in point here, evidently, is the constant rivalry between the Vedic and local tribes. In the *Rig-Veda* age the Bharatas most likely lived in the area between the Sarasvati (an ancient tributary of the Indus) and the Yamuna.

The Puru tribes enjoyed particular influence over the Vedic tribes. One of their rulers is referred to in the *Rig-Veda* as the conqueror of a tribe of *mlechchhas*, i.e., local non-Aryan tribes. Later the Purus joined an alliance of tribes known as the Kuru (the Kauravas). A large number of other tribes are also mentioned in the *Rig-Veda* which later were to play a significant part in the history of ancient India; these include the Chedi, Gandharas, Kikatas (the ancient name for the Magadhas).

The name Bharata was enshrined in special glory. In honour of that illustrious king the whole of Northern India was referred to even in ancient times as Bharatavarsha—"the land of the descendants of Bharata". (At the present time the Republic of India is officially known as Bharat.) Certain of the heroes in the *Mahabharata* come from Bharata's line: the poem tells of the great war fought by the descendants of Bharata.

The confrontation between the Kauravas and the Pandavas at the field of Kuru—Kurukshetra—is one of the main episodes in the epic writings of this age. The question as to the authenticity of the historical detail connected with this battle is the subject of fierce controversy among Indologists. Many scholars regarded the description of the battle as that of a real event which took place almost as long ago as the fourth or third millennium B.C. Contemporary Indologists tend to date the battle as having taken place somewhere between the eleventh and ninth centuries B.C. Important findings with bearing on this controversy were those made by Indian archeologists (led by B. B. Lal) at Hastinapur which is referred to in the *Mahabharata* as the main city of the Kauravas.

To judge by excavations the city of Hastinapur was abandoned by its inhabitants between the eleventh and ninth centuries B.C. as a result of flooding: these facts tie in with the data provided in the *Mahabharata*.

Regardless of whether or not the bloody battle of Kurukshetra actually took place or was no more than a subject of myth, that can, in the opinion of some scholars, be traced back to the Indo-Iranian period, the long rivalry between the tribes of Northern India undoubtedly led to the assertion of power by certain tribes over the rest. It is revealing to note that it was commonly accepted in ancient Indian writings that the battle of Kurukshetra marked the beginning of the new age. The Panchala and Kuru tribes, which according to the epic poem were the strongest and most influential, lost their political influence and the small states of Eastern India appeared on the political arena, in particular Koshala (with its capitals in Ayodhya and



Shravasti), Kashi (capital Varanasi) and Videha (capital Mithila). To the south of modern Bihar there arose the state of Magadha (capital Girivraja and later Rajagriha) and to the west Avanti (capital Ujjayini).

In later Vedic literature there are references to the division of the country into three parts: Aryavarta (the land of the Aryans)—the northern kingdom, Madhya-desha—the middle kingdom and Dakshinapatha—the southern kingdom. There are also references to a division into five parts—the middle, eastern, western, southern and northern lands.

The authors of the *Samhitas* and *Upanishads* of the later Vedic period were well acquainted with the whole of Northern India, many regions of Central India (that is to the north of the Narbada) and Eastern India. By that time the main outlines of the political map with which the sources of the next Magadha-Mauryan period were to deal had already been established.

## THE RELIGION AND CULTURE OF THE VEDIC AGE

### Vedic Religion, Mythology and Rites

Vedic texts enable us to acquaint ourselves with and study the religious views of the ancient Indians of the Vedic age and their mythology.

The beliefs of the Vedic tribes took shape and crystallised over an extremely long period of time, and particular stages of that process are reflected in various Vedic writings. However the Vedic religion or Vedism can, with certain reservations, be regarded as a well-defined system, a whole complex of religious (and, in part, religious and philosophical) beliefs together with corresponding rites and ceremonies. Within this system a number of specific beliefs can be singled out. These are either extremely archaic beliefs reflecting primitive social relations, or others that can be traced back to the ancient culture of the Indo-Europeans or the Indo-Iranians, or finally concepts that emerged as a result of the development of Vedic society itself in the period when the first Indian states were taking shape.

Vedism is the most ancient system of religious beliefs in India and it was to exert a major influence on later religious trends and philosophical teachings in the sub-continent, although, unlike Buddhism, it did not penetrate beyond.

An essential element of the Vedic religion is polytheism—worship of a large number of gods and divinities endowed with anthropomorphism.

The Indians of the Vedic age endowed various phenomena of Nature and also their gods with human attributes, human vices and virtues. Certain other gods encountered in the *Rig-Veda* are endowed

with terriormorphism, appearing in the form of animals, and maintain a fundamental link with the phenomena of Nature (the god Indra is sometimes represented as a bull and the god Agni as a steed). It was to the gods that they addressed their hymns, it was to the gods that sacrifices were offered. In their hymns the Vedic peoples asked the gods to send them more cattle, victory in battle, good harvests, or to free them from disaster and ruin. In the *Rig-Veda* a certain attempt can be traced to classify the gods. They can be more or less divided into three groups corresponding to the Vedic Indians' general concept of the tri-partite division of the world into heaven, earth and *antariksha* (the space between heaven and earth). Each of these three spheres had its corresponding gods. The heavenly gods included the Sun-god Surya, Ushas, the goddess of dawn, and Varuna, "the upholder of moral order". Among the terrestrial gods those held in highest esteem were the god of fire Agni and Soma, god of the holy intoxicating juice. Among the divinities of the *antariksha* were the god of storms Rudra, the god of wind Vayu and the mighty Indra. There is good reason to believe that these concepts of the Vedic tribes were linked to an older mythological conception of the tri-partite division of the world, which is to be found in the history of a number of other Indo-European peoples.

Alongside these very ancient gods which can be compared with Indo-European and Indo-Iranian mythological concepts (some of the Vedic gods for example provide clear parallels with Greek divinities \*) the Vedic pantheon also contained "strictly Indian" gods. Their worship took shape at the time when the Vedic Aryans were advancing across Indian territory.

One of the most popular gods with whose name many major natural phenomena were linked was Indra. Two hundred and fifty hymns in the *Rig-Veda* are dedicated to him (almost a quarter of the total number in the collection).

Indra is represented as a titanic figure, wielder of the thunderbolt, who easily slays with lightning thousands of foes. This brave warrior slays the giant serpent Vritra, who swallowed up the waters. Indra carries out numerous functions and features in a number of myths, all of which reflect his anthropomorphism.

The ancient Indians believed that the god Varuna ruled over the whole of the firmament round which he travelled on a chariot. He is the defender of order (*rita*) on earth and therefore it is he who determines the movements of the heavenly bodies and the actions of men. He upholds the earth, the heavens and the atmosphere, he ordains the sequence of the seasons. Varuna is unsparing in his reckonings with the sinful, but merciful unto the innocent and

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\* The Sky-god Dyaus can be likened to the Greek god Zeus (Roman Jupiter), the Sun-god Surya to the Greek god Helios, Varuna to Uranus, Ushas, the goddess of dawn, to Eos, etc.—*Auth.*

repentant. He even lays down moral standards for the gods. There are ethical aspects to his image which were to be elaborated in particular detail in subsequent religious and philosophical systems of ancient India.

An interesting and unusual figure is Rudra, the god of storms, who unlike the other deities possesses negative qualities. In the *Rig-Veda* he is assigned only secondary importance. The god Rudra is only entitled to take what the other gods do not accept from among the sacrifices offered them. Some scholars suggest that the figure of Rudra was taken over by the Aryans from the local tribes, through which fact they seek to explain his particular position in the Vedic pantheon. Later Rudra, the celestial healer, was to become one of the most popular of all gods—Shiva.

The Vedic tribes were also familiar with the god Vishnu. In the *Rig-Veda* a mere six hymns are dedicated to him, which tell how Vishnu traversed the universe in three strides. This legend assumed particular importance in the Hindu faith, in the context of which Vishnu was to become one of the principal gods.

A prominent place in the Vedic pantheon was occupied by the gods Agni and Soma. Agni was of fundamental importance with regard to religious rites, for it was only with his help that men were able to send their gifts to the gods. Sacrificial fire was regarded as the source of the gods' immortality. It is stressed in the Vedic hymns that the gods achieved immortality thanks to Agni. It was due to this that he provided the link, as it were, between gods and men. So it was with good reason that Agni was known as the messenger or ambassador. The cult of Agni could evidently be traced back to a very ancient conception of fire as the source of well-being in the family. In the *Rig-Veda* Agni is referred to as the protector of the household.

One hundred and twenty hymns in the *Rig-Veda* are dedicated to Soma, god of the holy intoxicating drink. Like Agni, Soma was also regarded as instrumental to the immortality of the gods. The gods strove to partake of this immortal drink. It was also sought after by men who held that it enabled them to merge with the gods as one.

Apart from benevolent gods, the Indians of the Vedic age believed in the existence of evil spirits and demons—*rakshasas*, and the *asuras*—enemies of the gods.

In the later Vedic age there emerged a group of "abstract" divinities. This included divinities whose functions were vague and who were not connected in any way with the tri-partite model of the world: the goddess of speech Vach, and the deity of faith Shraddha, to name only two of them. The singling out of this group resulted from the development of pantheistic ideas, a development which even made itself felt in the *Rig-Veda*, but was to assume particular importance in the later Vedic and epic mythology. In the overall

mythological pattern of the *Rig-Veda* the tri-partite world was not the only model, however it does facilitate a certain amount of classification within the realm of Vedic mythology.

A characteristic feature of the Vedic beliefs was the absence of any clear-cut individualisation of the gods or clear-cut distribution of their functions.

The deification of the forces of nature in the Vedic hymns for the most part took the form of anthropomorphism, which led to a certain degree of syncretism in the description of the gods. Furthermore, the same phenomena of Nature are to be found associated with various gods. There is no firmly stipulated hierarchy for the gods; but rather something in the way of an all-embracing essence intrinsic to a whole number of gods. At any moment a god might be turned to as the unique, only existing god, to whom would be ascribed those actions and powers, which in other situations might be associated with other gods. This veneration for one god at a time, as opposed to the "One God, the Most High" came to be known as *genotheism* (a term first used by the famous Indologist Max Müller). This feature reflected a certain trend towards a highly specific variety of *monotheism*, that found its most detailed expression in the doctrine of the *Upanishads*.

In the later Vedic age it was the god Prajapati, "lord of creatures", who assumed a position of prominence, yet he too failed to acquire the significance of the one, supreme god. Later the cult of Prajapati was replaced by that of the god Brahma.

It is possible that elements of syncretism in the description of the gods reflect a merging of the mythological concepts of different Vedic tribes.

As Vedism develops, changes come about in the significance of their various gods and their place in the general pattern of Vedic mythology and rites. The ancient gods are almost forgotten; some of the "senior" gods, such as Varuna, lose their position of prominence, and their place is taken by other divinities who earlier had had no particular role to play, for example the god Vishnu.

Vedism absorbed certain of the concepts upheld by local non-Aryan tribes, as the Indo-Aryans spread to ever new regions. This can be seen, for instance, from the magical rituals and incantations of the *Atharva Veda*.

In later Vedic literature a distinct trend is to be observed: Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu gradually emerge as the three principal deities, forming a trinity (*trimurti*).

The Indians of the Vedic age also worshipped various spirits and deified plants, mountains and rivers.

An essential part of the worship of the gods was the ritual of sacrifice. Hymns addressed to the gods were also indispensable to religious practice, although many of them were not ritualistic in character. Ritual was particularly prominent in the worship of Agni and Soma.

Gradually the rites of sacrifice became more and more intricate and this led to the emergence of several groups of priests who conducted various types of religious and ritualistic ceremonies.

Apart from elaborate ceremonies for various special occasions the Indian was required to carry out a number of rites in his everyday life; these made up part of his *dharma* (code of day-to-day behaviour and moral principles).

Special rites were performed at the birth of children, at marriage and to mark the death of relatives. Worship of ancestors also had an important part to play.

Particular importance was attached to sacrificial rites in the later Vedic texts—the *Brahmanas*. The Vedic god, Prajapati, is here represented as the god of sacrifice. Man's performance of sacrifice came to be regarded as his main desert, as the measure of his virtue; it was seen as the foundation of life that provided both gods and men with their *raison d'être*. Sacrifice and incantation made it possible for not only the gods but also men to attain immortality: the gods would enable a man's line to continue, bringing him descendants and happiness.

The Brahman priests sought to consolidate this belief; it was believed that they passed through a moment of complete identity with the gods during the ritual, and that they alone were held capable of correctly distributing the sacrifices among the gods.

To judge by the content of the *Rig-Veda* the ceremony for the offering of sacrifice took the following form. Sacrificial straw was placed on a special platform to provide a place for the gods, as it were. Sacrificial fire was then lit and some soma juice, or milk, was then poured on the flames, grains of corn were scattered or animals sacrificed.

Initially the Vedic tribes did not have temples, but later, possibly due to the influence of local religious practice, special buildings for worship appeared.

Scholars are not in agreement as to whether or not pictorial representation of the gods was practised in the Vedic age. Some passages from the Vedic texts would seem to imply that anthropomorphic portrayals of the gods were already to be found at this point.

## **Epic Mythology**

The mythology to be found in the epic poems is in general different from Vedic mythology, although some themes and concepts do echo those of the earlier period. As in the *Vedas*, in the epic mythology the elements of polytheism and anthropomorphism are clearly reflected in the portrayal of certain deities; some features of a Particular brand of pantheism are also present. On the other hand, some parts of the

overall mythology as found in the epic poems are lent new emphasis and content.

In the mythology of the epic poems two traditions emerge: the archaic tradition which reflects concepts pertaining to the Vedic or pre-Vedic (Indo-Iranian) periods, and the epic tradition which reflects new trends linked with the ensuing prominence of the three gods Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma. It is this second tradition which ties in the epic mythology with Hinduism that was to develop later.

Vishnu in the epic poems, as in the *Vedas*, is associated with Indra and he also traverses the universe in "three strides", however in the epic poems it is Vishnu who plays the leading role in this "alliance". Vishnu, as portrayed in the epic poems, is vested with rare powers: it is he who preserves, creates and destroys everything that exists, i. e., at this stage the three functions which later, in the Hindu tradition, are divided between the trinity of gods—Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma, are associated with Vishnu alone.

It is revealing to note that Brahma performs the same functions as Vishnu. This syncretism in relation to the properties of the principal gods points to the fact that in the epic poems there was not yet any clear demarcation between the functions of the gods, and the idea of the "united triad" of gods had not yet taken shape.

It is in the epics that we first encounter the god of war Skanda. Another interesting development is the transformation of the figures of Indra and Varuna. In the *Vedas* Indra had occupied the leading place in the pantheon. In the epics it is the warrior-in-chief, the god Skanda, who possesses his powers. The god Varuna ceases to be the one who preserves order in the universe (*rita*), and is now only a god of secondary importance.

The complexity of the mythology as found in the epic poems can most likely be attributed to the fact that the content of the poems themselves relate to a variety of planes: side by side with more or less archaic writings are texts of a much later date. This is particularly striking in the case of the figure of Rama. In the early parts of the *Ramayana* Rama is presented as a man, who is not endowed with any divine attributes, whereas in later passages of the poem he appears as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Another interesting figure is that of Krishna, who is portrayed not only as the leader of a tribe and friend of the Pandavas, but also as one of the incarnations of Vishnu, as a supreme being and finally as a god who is "the foundation of the whole world". However these transformations in the portrayals of epic characters reflected new features in the people's philosophy and beliefs: Vaishnavism had now appeared on the scene and was rapidly gaining ground in the second half of the first millennium B.C.

## Vedic Literature

The *Vedas* are the most ancient writings of India, although they embrace a very wide content and incorporate texts dating from more than one historical period. In keeping with ancient tradition it is customary to divide them into several groups of texts. First of all come the collections of hymns or *Samhitas*: *Rig-Veda* (a collection of hymns), the *Sama Veda* (a collection of chants), the *Yajur Veda* (a collection of prayers and formulas for sacrifices) and the *Atharva Veda* (a collection of incantations and formulas for magic). Then come the *Brahmanas*—interpretations of the ritual texts of the *Samhitas*, the *Aranyakas* (“forest books”) composed for hermits, and the *Upanishads*, religious-cum-philosophical treatises.

The most ancient of these writings is the *Rig-Veda* which was compiled at the end of the second millennium B.C. and the beginning of the first. It consists of 1,028 hymns on a wide range of themes and includes cosmogonic and wedding hymns. At a somewhat later date the *Atharva Veda* was written down: originally it was evidently composed by the Vedic tribes of Eastern India, although it includes some very ancient texts. A number of the hymns in the *Atharva Veda* echo the beliefs of non-Aryan local tribes.

The *Samhitas* consist mainly of collections of texts widely disparate in character, yet at the same time these ancient collections of writings can be regarded as literary works that reflect a long tradition of popular art handed down by word of mouth. The authors of the *Samhitas* were regarded as seers (*rishi*); the texts were learnt by heart and were sung by ancient bards. Even the most ancient hymns of the *Rig-Veda* were composed with strict observance of metrical rules that were also used in poetry of a later date. One of the metric forms, *anushtubha*, provided the basis for a subsequent one—*shloka*—which was the principal metric form used in these ancient Indian writings.

Many of the hymns describe nature and human emotions in such poetic form and with such rich imagery that they can be regarded as models of poetry. Particularly inspired are the hymns addressed to the goddess of dawn, Ushas. Taken as a whole these were essentially works of religious literature, yet they often resemble secular literature being rooted in everyday life and popular tradition. This feature of many Vedic texts reflects the specific character of Vedism in general, the anthropomorphic quality of many of its concepts. The gods were regarded as closely resembling human beings, and in the hymns addressed to them their authors described their own experiences and feelings, telling of their joys and sorrows.

In Vedic literature and even in the *Rig-Veda* elements of drama are to be found, that will be elaborated more fully in later periods of literature. An interesting example of this is provided in the so-called “hymns in dialogue” found in the *Rig-Veda*. It may be assumed that

they were not simply religious incantations but were designed for theatrical presentations. Some of the *Rig-Veda* legends provided writers of subsequent ages with subject matter for dramatic writings. The great Indian poet Kalidasa, for example, took as the basis for his play *Vikramorvashi* (Urvashi Won by Valour), the Vedic legend which tells of the love of the hero Pururavas for the celestial nymph Urvashi.

A number of hymns in Vedic literature are devoted to the struggle between good and evil forces, between powerful gods and demons, between the various tribes. Particularly colourful is the tale of the Battle of the Ten Kings, when the powerful ruler Sudas succeeded only with the help of the god Indra in escaping defeat by crossing the raging waters of the river Parushni. Scholars rightly regard the *Rig-Veda* as the initial source for the heroic epos that is a salient feature of the epic literature. From the literary historian's point of view the *Brahmanas* are less interesting than the *Samhitas*, although in the *Brahmanas* we also find legends and tales, such as the Indian version of the Flood legend, side by side with prosaic interpretations of religious rituals.

Vedic literature also included *Vedangas* which reflected a new stage in the development of scientific knowledge. There were six of these: *Shiksha* (Phonetics), *Vyakarana* (Grammar), *Nirukta* (Etymology), *Kalpa* (Ritual), *Chhandas* (Metrics) and *Jyotisha* (Astronomy). All these texts came under the heading *Shruti* as opposed to the *Smriti* of a later literary period.

### Epic Literature

The most remarkable of the epic poems of ancient India are the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* which were written down far later, between the fourth century B.C. and the fourth century A.D. However the main subject matter of these poems and many of the stories that went into them undoubtedly stem from the first half of the first millennium B.C. The main content of the *Mahabharata* is concerned with the struggle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas which terminated in the battle at Kurukshetra which lasted for eighteen days.

The *Ramayana* tells of the campaign undertaken by the king Rama to Lanka to set free his beloved, Sita, who had been captured by the wicked demon Ravana. Some scholars are inclined to regard the *Mahabharata* as the portrayal of real events supposed to have taken place at the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium B.C.: the subject matter of the *Ramayana* is often interpreted as a recollection of the struggle between the Aryans and the peoples of Southern India. Regardless of whether or not the events described are historically authentic, both works are indisputably rooted in popular tradition that spreads back over many centuries.



Some scholars see the *Ramayana* as a literary presentation of the Indo-Aryans' penetration from the north as far as distant Lanka (Sri Lanka of today).

Both poems are truly enormous collections: the *Mahabharata* has almost 100,000 couplets (*shlokas*) and the *Ramayana*, 24,000.

Apart from the main themes in these poems we find a host of inserted episodes. In the *Mahabharata* these occupy almost three-quarters of the text. Certain of these episodes are myths which sometimes have no bearing on the main narrative, or whole stories such as the poem about Nala and Damayanti, and exhortations. Despite this, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are extremely well integrated works, not mosaics consisting of a variety of texts, but unified works, and each is a compositional whole. The authorship of the *Mahabharata* is traditionally ascribed to Vyasa, and the *Ramayana* to the poet Valmiki but nothing definite is known of these poets or seers (*rishi*). It would seem that Vyasa and Valmiki were folk bards, but unlike many others they were so famous that their names have been passed down from generation to generation. The fact that these poems were handed down by word of mouth for several centuries left its mark on their style and language.

These poems provide posterity with veritable encyclopedias of ancient India. They contain most interesting material on various aspects of social and cultural life, the political organisation and everyday life of the ancient Indians. It would probably be true to say that in India these poems are unrivalled in popularity. In ancient times and in the middle ages they were famed far beyond India's frontiers: in Eastern and Southern Asia, and also in the Far and Middle East. Translations of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* into a number of European languages were widely acclaimed. Many outstanding figures in the history of Western and Oriental culture, including Beethoven, Heine, Rodin, Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru, were inspired by them. These epic legends still remain some of the best loved literary works in the India of today.

### **The Early Rudiments of Science**

The material contained in the Vedic texts gives the reader not merely an idea of the development of literature in the ancient period but also indicates the level of scientific knowledge attained by this stage, even though the evidence is of a somewhat fragmentary nature.

The religious worship of the Vedic peoples involved a certain familiarity with astronomy. The Indians of the Vedic age were not only familiar with the Sun and the Moon, but also aware of the existence of other planets, and indeed that of whole constellations. Their calendar was elaborated in detail and laid down with precision. The year was divided into twelve months, each of which had thirty days.

The Vedic texts also show the mathematical knowledge that had been achieved in that distant age. Of particular interest here are the *Shulpa-sutras*, or "rules of the cord" (*shulpa*), which outline sets of rules for measurement. These texts lay down methods for measuring altars, the construction of various geometrical figures and elaborate systems of calculation, etc.

The science of medicine had reached a relatively high level at this stage. The Indians were familiar with many human diseases and forms of treatment (involving herbs, special ointments, water treatment, etc.). To judge by early Vedic writings there were already in existence professional healers (*bhishaj*). The *Atharva Veda* is particularly rich in material relating to medicine and it contains a large number of incantations to ward off disease. Side by side with the mythological conceptions are fairly rational observations.

The Indians of the Vedic age linked man's diseases with the wrath of the gods and recovery was seen as a sign of their good will. Special hymns were dedicated to divine healers, *ashvins*, to Varuna and Soma, who were considered the "kings of medicine". At that time magic played an important part in the treatment of disease, but the properties of herbs and methods of their medical application were already known. The *Samhitas* show that healers of that time were familiar with diseases of the eyes, heart, stomach, lungs and skin. The texts contain mention of names for close on three hundred different parts of the body.

The findings of archeologists and written sources provide some idea of the material culture of that period and also of the everyday life of the ancient Indians of the Vedic age.

### **The *Upanishads* and Their Teaching**

It is customary in India to classify the *Upanishads* as the final part of Vedic literature. They comprise a group of texts that include various religious and philosophical interpretations of Vedic myths and rites. The *Upanishads* were also known as the *Vedanta* or the end of the *Vedas*. This name was later adopted by one of the schools of philosophy which more than any other claimed to be based strictly on ancient religious and philosophical thought. The injunctions of the Vedic religion were being elaborated in increasingly concrete terms with the passage of time. A parallel development was the singling out from the overall system of certain independent motifs: the works elucidating these motifs became prototypes for subsequent scientific treatises.

Essentially the texts of the *Upanishads* represented both the culmination of the Vedic period in Indian culture and also its natural limit. The conceptions evolved during the whole of the era preceding them were subjected in their entirety to an original and interesting

reappraisal in the *Upanishads*. Proceeding from a basically traditional approach, the authors of these texts were able to resolve problems extending far beyond the scope of Vedic themes. The result of this inspired attainment can be seen in the ambivalent role played by the *Upanishads* throughout India's subsequent cultural evolution. For the generations that followed they embodied the most archaic and hence particularly revered sphere of culture, while at the same time they became an intrinsic part of a new range of religious and philosophical concepts already far removed from Vedism. In Indian history they thus came to represent the vital connecting link between two eras of history, and in the broader sense the symbol of continuity for the whole cultural tradition. The etymology of the name *Upanishads* has still not been completely resolved. More likely than not it indicates the way in which the texts were transmitted: the teacher would expound them to his pupils sitting at his feet (*upa + ni + shad*—to sit near), and later they were interpreted as "secret knowledge". The commonly agreed number of *Upanishads* is 108, but of these only 13 are regarded as the most ancient texts: they were composed between the seventh and fourth centuries B.C. and came to be called the basic ones. The most important of these—the *Brihadaranyaka* and the *Chandogya*—are also the earliest of the *Upanishads*. The narrator in these works is usually some revered teacher or sage (these teachers were most likely historical characters). The main theme of these exhortations and deliberations is a correct reading of the *Vedas*; their immediate meaning is assumed to be already familiar, it is treated here as allegorical or as an allusion to the true, "hidden" meaning, to the elucidation of which this whole group of texts is devoted.

In essence the *Upanishads* represent the first attempt to explain the world within the framework of a single teaching. Through these texts there runs one clearly defined idea: on each occasion the authors of the *Upanishads* expound it in a different way, but its essence remains unchanged. Its most concise formulation consists of a mere six words: "Atman is Brahman, Brahman is Atman." Many of these texts are devoted to interpretation of this dictum. The course of discussion is usually as follows: the world is essentially in a state of uninterrupted change; this change finds expression not only in the transformation of external objects, but affects to an equal degree the "spiritual world".

The *Upanishads* proceed from the ancient animistic beliefs and formulate the so-called doctrine of *Karma*, which later was to permeate not only orthodox doctrines but also such religious teachings as Jainism and Buddhism. The doctrine of *Karma* stipulated that everything is determined by the moral law; each thing possesses a soul, the soul is born and dies, and later reappears in one form or another, depending upon man's actions in his previous life; a man who degraded himself by immoral actions is born again in the form of an animal, plant or stone, but through upright behaviour he can raise himself up even from a fossil to human form once again.

Apart from directly perceptible phenomena this scheme of things embraces (albeit in a somewhat contrived way) the whole world of demons and deities born of Vedism: the soul can raise itself up as high as divine rank, taste the joys of paradise or sink as low as hell, but no state (and this is where the *Upanishads* reveal a marked departure from Vedic tradition) is permanent; even the gods to whom sacrifices are offered are only names of states in which specific souls find themselves. Here the *Karma* emerges as an instrument which subordinates the whole diversity of the phenomena perceived by man to a specific unifying principle.

In the *Upanishads*, the *Karma* doctrine accords with the conception of the eternal flow of life—*Samsara*. These two concepts taken together were to become an integral part of many religious and philosophical systems in India, where the doctrines of *Karma* and *Samsara* were subsequently to be elaborated in far more detail. The *Upanishads* are not confined to a description of the infinite fluidity and interconnection of phenomena: they tend rather to treat this whole pattern of ideas as something in the way of an overture to the central part of their teaching, the identification of the *Atman* (the inner ego of each being) with the Brahman (i.e., the impersonal, all-embracing divine essence of the entire world). But this is more than just an attempt to establish some primordial unity of all the diverse forms of existence, it is the corner-stone of a minutely elaborated code of behaviour, the nature and aims of which have undeniable religious implications.

It is clear that in a number of places the *Upanishads* reveal marked differences with Vedic teaching, precisely because their authors found the latter teaching insufficiently profound in the religious sense. Many traditional tenets are interpreted in them in a new light and new explanations are offered. The Vedic Indian revered his traditional gods, endowed with many very mundane characteristics, for the good fortune they sent him in return for his sacrifices. The *Upanishads* present a very different teaching. There are no personal gods, just as there is no personal man, limited in terms of space or time. Man resembles all other creatures, in that he is part of the unending cycle of existence, the whole indestructible integrity of which is found in every atom. The flow of life is eternal, and all living things in the universe are subject to it. Man is the only one of all the "atoms" capable of apprehending the essence of this process, and later even of achieving inner liberation from all the fetters of life. Yet, despite all this, man returns to a terrestrial existence and once again takes up his place in the unending cycle of births.

The ideal of the *Upanishads* is the seer who does not intervene in the affairs of the world, remaining indifferent to all upheavals and passions, even to religion itself. After recognising that he is part of everything around him and equating himself with the world so to speak, what more should he desire? He is above the elements and the

gods; he alone has attained an existence which is as eternal and indestructible as the world itself, or what the *Upanishads* present as the world's constant symbol, the Brahman.

These and many other conceptions and ideas go to make up the strictly speculative philosophical system of the *Upanishads*, which is cut off from real life. Yet at the same time it is not only idealist views and concepts that are to be found in the *Upanishads*, but rationalistic ones as well. Moreover in these texts there clearly emerges not only a complex coexistence of these two trends but also rivalry between them, a phenomenon still under the surface in the earlier texts of the *Brahmanas* and the *Aranyakas*. In the *Upanishads* it is to the three seers Shandilya, Yajnavalkya and Uddalaka that the highest esteem is shown. The first two are presented as adhering to the fundamental idealist concept, the identification of *Atman* and Brahman (it is not without reason that orthodox tradition referred repeatedly to their doctrines), while Uddalaka gave voice to realistic ideas coming very close to a spontaneous variety of materialism. He interprets boldly, in a way all his own, the cosmogonic hymns of the *Vedas*, ruling out any special role played by the gods in creating the universe. Uddalaka endows Nature with the main creative force; in his opinion all that exists in the world (and this means both physical and mental processes, including consciousness) is the product of material elements. Even the conception of *Atman* is interpreted in a different light: *Atman* is presented as the initial material human base.

It is quite natural that ideas of this sort should appear in the wake of the advance of the ancient Indians' natural-scientific knowledge and as a result of major social change. Taken all in all the concepts found in the *Upanishads* were to exert an enormous influence on the whole of India's subsequent cultural development.

The *Karma* doctrine that is found in the *Upanishads* constituted one of the basic principles of Indian religions. It also possessed specific social implications, insofar as it provided an answer to the crucial question as to the reason behind human suffering and adversity. Not the gods but man was declared the judge of his actions, and human sufferings were not acknowledged as eternal. Some of the principles laid down in the *Upanishads* were later used in Buddhist and Jaina teachings (see below). Later the materialist school—*Lokayata*—turned to the "materialist current" in the overall teaching of the *Upanishads*. Many of the ideas found in the *Upanishads* had a major influence on the philosophers and writers of the Middle Ages, and on cultural developments in modern and contemporary history, not only within India itself but also far beyond her borders.

## INDIA IN THE MAGADHA AND MAURYAN PERIODS

Historians usually regard the middle of the first millennium B. C. as the beginning of the next period in the history of ancient India. This was the Magadha and Mauryan age which was to last for some four centuries (up until the fall of the great Mauryan empire and the Shunga and Kanva dynasties). It occupies a far longer period in time than the actual history of the Mauryan dynasty, and represents one of the most important stages in the country's historical and cultural development. The Mauryan period was marked by the creation (for the first time in Indian history) of a united state, by economic and cultural advances and the spread of writing. The Mauryan period was also distinguished by the consolidation and propagation of Buddhism, by the emergence of Vaishnavism and Shaivism. It is easy to understand why in present-day India this period is regarded as a turning point in the development of the country's culture and ancient India's statehood.

For this period, unlike the one before, dated sources are available: epigraphy (for instance the edicts issued by the Mauryan king, Ashoka) and written works (records kept by the Seleucid ambassador Megasthenes, who lived at the court of King Chandragupta). The political treatise, the *Arthashastra*, ascribed to Kautilya, adviser to Chandragupta, has for many centuries been regarded as a work of the early Mauryan period. New research has revealed that in its present form the *Arthashastra* was written down in the early years of our era, but many of its details unquestionably reflect features of the state structure pertaining to the preceding period, and in particular to the Mauryan age. In this context comparisons of epigraphic data and written sources are of particular interest.

Historians investigating this period have at their disposal the Buddhist Pali Canon, in which side by side with expositions of Buddhist doctrine and ethics there is important material relating to the political, social and cultural life in ancient India. In certain of Ashoka's inscriptions mention is made of the names of a number of *Sutras* included in the Pali Canon, which indicates that these texts existed at that period. Interesting material on this period has also been brought to light by archeologists.

### The Rise of Magadha

The political history of Northern India in the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries B.C. abounds in colourful events. It was the period when the first large states took shape, gained strength and then contended for supremacy.

Written sources make it clear that numerous wars and military armed clashes took place between the states, not to mention dynastic feuds and struggles between monarchies and republican unions.

Evidence of early Buddhist sources make possible the assertion that there existed sixteen *mahajanapadas* (or "great lands") in Northern India in the middle of the sixth century B.C. This did not, however, cover all the states of Northern India. In reality their number was far above that estimate. The number sixteen would only have covered the largest and most powerful among them.

It is revealing to note that it became the accepted tradition in India to place fourteen of the sixteen "great lands" in the "Middle Land", which reflects the all-important role of the Ganges valley states in the political geography of India in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. This also points to the more rapid development of statehood in that part of India.

The dominant force in the political arena of Northern India at that time, the centre around which the North Indian states rallied, was Magadha. This name is first mentioned in the *Atharva Veda*, later it appears in a wide variety of ancient Indian sources.

The ancient state of Magadha (situated in what is now Southern Bihar) occupied an extremely advantageous geographical position that gave it great strategic and commercial potential. Written sources contain references to the fertility of the soil of Magadha, which was the object of painstaking cultivation. The state carried on lively trade with many parts of India, and was richly endowed with minerals, including metals. The ancient capital was Rajagriha (the Pali name for it was Rajagaha, and it is now known as Rajgir).

Little is known of Magadha's dynastic history. There are certain historical references to the founder of the Haryanka dynasty, Bimbisara (545/544-493 B.C.), who according to Buddhist writings subjugated the neighbouring state of Anga. This strengthened Magadha's position and laid the foundations for its expansionist policies. In historical sources references are also found to the links between Magadha and the states of Western and Northern India.

Bimbisara devoted a good deal of attention to the internal consolidation of his state, introducing strict control over the activities of his state officials. Under Bimbisara's son, Ajatashatru (493-461 B.C.), fierce hostilities were waged against Prasenajit (Pali name—

Pasenadi), ruler of Koshala, one of the most powerful states in the Ganges valley. After long rivalry Magadha finally emerged victorious.

Another desperate struggle was that against the republican alliance of the Lichchhavis who lived to the north of Magadha. This clash was brought about by the Lichchhavis' seizure of a port on the river Ganges, which Magadha was also anxious to secure. While waiting for the Lichchhavis to attack, King Ajatashatru gave orders for the building of a special fortress, Pataligrama. He also resorted to cunning and sent into the Lichchhavis' capital Vaishali one of his state officials who succeeded in disuniting the enemy's camp. To judge by a number of sources the war between Magadha and the Lichchhavis lasted for sixteen years; once again it was Magadha that was to emerge victorious.

Jaina texts reveal that King Ajatashatru used siege catapults and owed his success to them.

Another major rival of Magadha was the powerful state of Avanti in Western India.

The struggle waged by Magadha's main rivals—Koshala, Avanti and the Lichchhavi alliance was a contest not only for political but also for economic supremacy. For this reason great importance was always attached to control over the Ganges river system, which provided a crucial trade route.

In order to consolidate Magadha's power Ajatashatru's son Udayin (461-445 B.C.) transferred the capital from Rajagriha to Pataliputra that became a major centre in ancient India. The power of the state of Avanti was undermined at a later date, in the time of King Shishunaga, who came from a new line, the Shaishunaga dynasty. This dynasty later gave way to the Nanda dynasty, under whom a large empire was established. Knowledge of the dynasties' chronology is far from complete, and the dates accepted by scholars are only pointers. Scholars of this period base themselves for the main part on data to be found in later Ceylonese chronicles (the *Dipavamsa* of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. and the *Mahavamsa* of the sixth century A.D.) and also in the *Puranas* compiled in the early medieval period. The following dates are regarded as the most acceptable: the Haryanka dynasty founded by Bimbisara (437-413 B.C.), the Shaishunaga dynasty (413-345 B.C.) and the Nanda dynasty (345-317/314 B.C.).

### **The Achaemenid Empire and the Indian Campaign of Alexander of Macedon**

A very different situation was to be found in North-Western India, where there was no large state capable of uniting surrounding tribes and peoples, as was the case in the Ganges valley. This area was



peopled by tribes of various ethnic origin, of a wide variety of languages and cultures. The strongest states were Kamboja and Gandhara which numbered among the sixteen "great lands".

At the end of the sixth century B.C. some regions of North-Western India formed part of the Achaemenid empire.

In rock inscriptions of the famous Achaemenid emperor, Darius (522-486 B.C.), Gandhara and the trans-Indus region are named among his satrapies. The latter evidently incorporated areas in the central and lower reaches of the Indus River, but may have included neighbouring territories as well. Herodotus has left us an interesting reference to an expedition undertaken by Scylax of Caryanda at the command of Darius with the aim of ascertaining "the spot where the Indus River enters the sea". This expedition was important from both a strategic and scientific point of view. It enabled the Persians to acquaint themselves more closely with the population of the Indian regions, with their customs and traditions.

Only a part of North-Western India was incorporated into the Achaemenid empire, yet these territories and certain other parts of the country were subjected to a certain degree of cultural and political influence of Achaemenid Persia.

By way of its western territories India was to come into contact with the states of the Near East and Central Asia, parts of which had also been incorporated into the Achaemenid empire. The official language of that empire's records was Aramaic, which was used in that part of the world later on too.

While a good deal was known in the West about those areas of India which formed part of the Achaemenid empire, classical writers of that period knew practically nothing about Eastern India and the political events that were taking place in the valley of the Ganges. According to Herodotus that part of the country was mere desert. India's ties with states of the West, and this also applies to the eastern provinces of the country, changed considerably after the campaign of Alexander of Macedon.

Alexander marched into Indian territory at the height of his fame, after securing major military victories. His enormous and well-equipped army seemed assured of further successes. Moreover North-Western India was divided between mutually hostile alliances of tribes; between the rulers of the small state alliances there was no unity. Some of the petty kings in the area (such as the ruler of Taxila) allied themselves with Alexander. In return for this Alexander promised them a certain degree of autonomy and allowed them to retain their former possessions. However from the very beginning of the Indian campaign Alexander was to encounter fierce resistance from many tribes. The chroniclers of the campaign, who endeavoured to extol Alexander's feats and successes, could not fail to remark on the amazing persistence displayed by the Indians, their bravery and passionate desire to fight to the bitter end. Many Indian tribes refused

outright to negotiate with the Greeks and Macedonians and threw themselves into the unequal struggle: indeed on a good number of occasions they were even to emerge victorious.

The strongest of the Indian rulers in North-Western India was King Porus, one of those who resolved to face up to Alexander in open battle. This battle, which lasted several days, took place on the banks of the Hydaspes (the River Jhelum). The scale of the battle can be deduced from the figures cited by Arrian in his *Anabasis of Alexander* (A History of Alexander's Campaign). Arrian informs us that in the last decisive battle thirty thousand foot soldiers and four thousand cavalry took part, that three hundred chariots and two hundred elephants were used. Only by resorting to a cunning manoeuvre was Alexander able to break through Porus' ranks. His lightly armed cavalry sowed panic among the well-armed but slow-moving Indian forces. Alexander emerged victorious from this encounter but King Porus fought to the last, despite his serious wounds. The courage of the Indian king won over Alexander, and he not only spared Porus' life but even allowed him to retain his possessions.

Alexander's army then moved further eastwards as far as Hydroates (modern Ravi). Alexander started rallying his forces to cross the river Hyphasis (modern Beas). Yet first he decided to find out all he could about the country beyond the Hyphasis, about its ruler and its army. Local petty rulers told Alexander of the land's wealth, and of the strong army led by an Indian chieftain named Agrammes. By that time discontent was making itself felt among Alexander's own troops, many of whom were demanding the cessation of this exhausting campaign. Reluctantly Alexander at last agreed to abandon his dream and gave the order to withdraw. The retreat of the Greco-Macedonian troops coincided with a new wave of anti-Macedonian uprisings and disturbances. They met with particularly stiff resistance from the Mallas, who had a strong army and were well organised.

On leaving India Alexander left behind him the division into satrapies with his experienced commanders and a number of local Indian rulers in charge. Alexander had only succeeded in subjugating part of North-Western India and in Indian sources there is no mention of Alexander's campaign, nor of the resistance to his army (this information was handed down to us by classical authors). Nevertheless influence of the campaign on the events of that period of Indian history cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Alexander's campaign showed that one of the main reasons for the Indians' defeat was the lack of unity, the internal feuds. Their struggle against foreign invaders obliged the local kings to join forces.

The campaign also led to a considerable extension and consolidation of cultural and trade links between India and the outside world. India itself began to exert an increasing influence on the Hellenistic world.

## **The State of the Nandas**

At the time of Alexander's campaign it was the Nanda dynasty that was ruling in Pataliputra. Local petty kings told Alexander of the strength of the Nanda troops, of the unpopularity of King Agrammes. This can be gleaned from the works of classical writers, although much of the information relating to the Nanda empire has come down to us mainly from local Indian sources.

According to Indian tradition the Nanda rulers were regarded as a *shudra* dynasty that had supposedly wiped out all the *kshatriyas*, and the first of the Nanda rulers was the son of a *shudra* mother and of unknown descent. This explains why Brahman sources and dynastic chronicles (the *Puranas*) list the Nandas as "men of mean virtue and mean birth". This description was also to be found in the writings of classical writers, who would, it appears, have been familiar with Indian tradition. Some data give us reason to assume that classical writers were acquainted with Indian legends about the first Mauryan king Chandragupta, and his minister Chanakya. This cycle of legends also contains references to the predecessors of the Mauryans—the kings of the Nanda dynasty.

References in local and classical sources coincide when it comes to descriptions of the Nandas' enormous army. Diodorus and Quintus Curtius Rufus list the following figures pertaining to the Nanda army under Agrammes: 200,000 foot soldiers, 20,000 cavalry, 2,000 chariots and between three and four thousand elephants. In some Indian and Ceylonese texts the first Nanda king is given the name of Ugrasena, which means "having an enormous army".

Another characteristic traditionally attributed to the Nandas is their urge to accumulate wealth; the Ceylonese texts reveal that the Nandas made all manner of possessions subject to tax including leather, wood and precious stones.

Making good use of their strong army and methodical system for the collection of taxes, the Nanda rulers were extremely active in the field of foreign policy. They succeeded in breaking the power and independence of certain local dynasties and penetrating regions of the Deccan further to the south. Epigraphic sources make it clear that the state of Kalinga (now Orissa) or some of it was part of the Nanda empire.

The empire which resulted from these endeavours of the Nanda rulers laid the foundation for the organisation of a united Indian state under the Mauryan dynasty which was to follow.

### **The Emergence of the Mauryan Empire. Chandragupta and Bindusara**

The first king of the Mauryan dynasty was Chandragupta. However before Chandragupta achieved this eminence he had to wage a fierce

struggle against the Nandas, and also against the Greek garrisons left in India by Alexander. In Indian and classical sources there are many interesting references to the various stages of the struggle waged by Chandragupta to gain power, although the chronology of the chapters in that struggle is still a subject of great controversy among the historians.

Different theories are put forward with regard to the origins of the Mauryans. Some link them to the Nandas and hold that Chandragupta was one of the sons of the Nanda king. However in most sources (Buddhist and Jaina ones) the Mauryans are represented as a *kshatriya* clan from Magadha.

Buddhist and Jaina tradition tells of Chandragupta's early years, his study in Taxila, where he is thought to have met his mentor and future adviser Kautilya (or Chanakya). It is difficult to say how far these data can be relied on. Tradition asserts that Chandragupta, together with Chanakya, elaborated a plan in Taxila for seizing the throne of Magadha. It is interesting to note that the clash between the young Chandragupta and the Nandas is also recorded by the Roman writer, Justinus (second century A.D.) who drew on the materials to be found in the works of Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus, a writer in the age of Emperor Augustus, who in his turn probably drew on the cycle of Chandragupta legends.

From Ceylonese chronicles it emerges that Chanakya started mustering forces together with Chandragupta: warriors were hired in a number of regions, and soon an enormous army led by Chandragupta had come into being.

The Greek writer Plutarch (46-126 A.D.) even has a reference to a meeting between the young Chandragupta and Alexander. This meeting, even if it really did take place, could have taken place after the first confrontation between Chandragupta and the Nanda king. According to Plutarch, Chandragupta had a very low opinion of the Nanda king Agrammes and was inclined to support Alexander, urging the latter to move his army eastwards against the Indian king who was universally despised. However Alexander did not, as we know, undertake a campaign into the heart of India, and was obliged to return west whence he had come.

Buddhist and Jaina sources tell that Chandragupta's first attempt to overthrow the Nandas was unsuccessful, since he did not secure his rear. At that period Chandragupta could naturally not embark on an offensive against the strong army of the Greeks and Macedonians as well. After Alexander's main troops had left India conditions played into Chandragupta's hands.

Alexander divided the territory he had conquered into satrapies, leaving part of the lands to Indian rulers too. Soon afterwards rebellions broke out against Macedonian rule and a power struggle between the satrapies began that became particularly intense after the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. Chandragupta, then in the Punjab,

was clearly ready to launch a strife against the remaining Macedonian garrisons, by now only shadows of their former selves. When the last satrap Eudemos was obliged to leave India in 317 B. C., Chandragupta had become the virtual ruler of the Punjab. At the same time one of his main rivals was killed—the mighty Indian king Porus, who ruled over large territories that had been given him by Alexander. Attention now focussed on the vital seizure of the throne of Magadha, and Chandragupta, after making sure of the support of a number of republican unions from North-Western India, moved his army against the Nandas.

Thus the war against the Greco-Macedonian troops can be seen as one of the stages in Chandragupta's struggle for power, for the throne at Pataliputra. The freeing of Indian territories from foreign troops was an important step, yet even writers of ancient Greece and Rome inform us that after his victory Chandragupta forfeited the name of liberator, turning India into a slave-camp: after securing power he subjected his peoples to oppression, those same peoples which he had freed from foreign domination (Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus cited by Junianus Justinus).

The struggle against the Nandas was an extremely stubborn one. The Nanda kings had an enormous army and in the decisive battle a million soldiers, ten thousand elephants, a hundred thousand horses and five thousand charioteers perished, according to the Buddhist text *Milinda-panha* (these figures are of course highly exaggerated but the legend of a grim, bloody battle lives on).

Chandragupta's coronation took place in 317 B.C. This date coincides with data from Indian (Buddhist and Jaina) and classical sources, although many historians date the Mauryan dynasty from later times.

From classical sources we learn of the confrontation between Chandragupta and Seleucus Nikator—a former comrade-in-arms of Alexander and later the king of Syria—and of the peace concluded between them. No indication is provided in these sources as to the reasons for the hostilities breaking out. We can merely assume that Chandragupta, after consolidating his newly gained power, turned to his own advantage the struggle for supremacy going on between Alexander's heirs and the diadochi, and attacked Seleucus. He was anxious to win back those regions which Alexander had seized and which had fallen to Seleucus after Alexander's death. In the peace treaty concluded after the hostilities Chandragupta gave Seleucus 500 elephants, while the Mauryans gained Paropamisus, Arachosia, and Gedrosia.

Seleucus sent his ambassador, Megasthenes, to Chandragupta's court; Megasthenes described his sojourn in a special work entitled *Indika* (of which only fragments have been preserved).

After Chandragupta, who ruled for 24 years (probably from 317 to 293 B. C.), the throne of Magadha went to his son Bindusara, known

to the Greeks as Amitrochates (Sanskrit: Amitraghata—“the slayer of his foes”). This title reflected, it appears, the tense situation obtaining in the country at that period. Uprisings were rife in a number of areas and some evidence would indicate that during Bindusara's reign a number of territories in the Deccan were captured, although no epigraphic finds relating to this period have been made.

Bindusara, like his father, maintained close diplomatic ties with Hellenistic Egypt and the Seleucid empire. Strabo writes that a Seleucid ambassador by the name of Deimachos was sent to Pataliputra. Athenaios writes of interesting facts in connection with the exchange of messages between the Seleucid king Antiochus and the Indian king Bindusara. The Indian king asked Antiochus to send him sweet wine, dried figs and a Sophist philosopher. Bindusara was promised only wine and figs, for Antiochus was not allowed to sell any Sophists.

If we are to believe the *Puranas* Bindusara reigned for 25 years (293-268 B.C.). After his death there was long and bitter rivalry between his sons for power. Eventually Ashoka came to the throne in Pataliputra.

## THE MAURYAN EMPIRE DURING THE REIGN OF ASHOKA

### Piyadasi-Ashoka

Under Ashoka the Mauryan state achieved the zenith of its power. The territory of the empire was extended and it became one of the largest in the ancient East. Its fame spread far beyond the confines of India. Legends grew up around Ashoka and his activities in which special emphasis was laid on his feats in connection with the propagation of Buddhism. These Buddhist legends came to be well known in many countries of Asia.

The many edicts issued by Ashoka provide important information about the history of this period, the way in which the empire was administered, and about the policies of the Mauryans. In the edicts the Mauryan king is referred to as Devanampiya Piyadasi, which means “King Piyadasi, dear to the gods”. Only in two edicts is the king given the name Ashoka. Some later sources revealed that Piyadasi was the actual name of Bindusara's son before he seized the throne; then, after becoming king, he was also known as Ashoka (literally—“bereft of sadness”).

In the Greek versions of his edicts found in Kandahar, the Mauryan king is referred to as Piyadasi. The Ceylonese chronicles tell how Piyadasi, when still only the heir to the throne, was sent by his father, King Bindusara, to rule in Western India (to the province of Avanti) with its centre in Ujjayani (Ujjain). According to North Indian sources the king's son was in North-Western India in the town of Taxila, where Bindusara had sent him to put down an uprising

among the local inhabitants against the king's officials. These sources also tell of Piyadasi's fierce struggle against his brothers to assert power. The chronicles from Ceylon relate that this rivalry continued even after Ashoka had seized the throne of Magadha. This explained why Ashoka's official coronation took place only four years after he came to power.

### **The War Against Kalinga**

The only major political event mentioned in the edicts of King Ashoka was the war against Kalinga, a powerful state on the western shore of the Bay of Bengal (modern Orissa). In the edict concerned King Ashoka declares that during that war 150,000 prisoners were taken and more than 100,000 men were killed. The annexation of Kalinga, important from both a strategic and commercial point of view, helped to consolidate the empire.

Kalinga put up a determined resistance to King Ashoka. This region had been part of the Nanda empire previously, and then succeeded in achieving independence. In a special edict dedicated to the conquest of Kalinga Ashoka himself acknowledged that stern measures of punishment had been used against both the common people and the nobility which had also been reluctant to reconcile itself to the power of the Mauryans. Ashoka was even obliged to introduce special measures in order to reduce tension in the newly conquered territories. Kalinga was granted a large degree of independence, however the emperor kept a personal check on the activities of his officials there, making sure that citizens were not imprisoned without due cause and that no suffering was instigated without good purpose.

Many historians consider that the war against Kalinga forced Ashoka to abandon his traditional active foreign policy, aimed at setting up a united state. As they see it, the emperor had by this time become a dreamer, no longer striving after extension and consolidation of his influence and power. However these views do not coincide with the data provided in source materials. Ashoka did not relinquish his active foreign policy, he merely changed his methods to some degree. Without forgetting his power and using force where necessary, the Mauryan ruler employed in the main ideological and diplomatic weapons. Relying on specially appointed officials and on diplomatic missions he went out of his way to consolidate his influence in territories not yet conquered, promising their inhabitants the emperor's affection and good care, fatherly concern and all manner of support.

In one of his edicts Ashoka issued the following instructions to his officials: "The people of unconquered lands must become firmly convinced that in our eyes the King is like a father. He feels towards

his people what he would feel towards himself, they are dear to him as his children.”

Ashoka maintained close diplomatic relations with many countries. In his edicts there is mention of the Seleucid king, Antiochus II Theos (grandson of Seleucus); Ptolemy II Philadelphus, King of Egypt; King Antigonos Gonatus of Macedon; King Magas of Cyrene and King Alexander of Epirus. Mauryan envoys or *dutas* were sent to various countries where they told of their powerful and upright King Ashoka.

Particularly close ties were maintained with Ceylon, where Ashoka sent a special mission headed by his son Mahinda (Mahendra) to propagate Buddhism.

The then king of Ceylon, Tissa, in gratitude for this, assumed in Ashoka's honour his title Devanampiya (Dear to the Gods), and sent an ambassador to Pataliputra.

### Chronology

The dates of Ashoka's reign are still subject of great controversy among historians, although his inscriptions contain important information bearing on this question. In the so-called Major Rock Edicts made twelve years after Ashoka's coronation simultaneous mention is made of five Hellenistic rulers, which means that in the year the edict was made all five kings were still alive. This could have meant 256 or 255 B.C. This would imply that Ashoka's reign began in approximately 268 B.C.

Interesting research has been carried out with regard to astronomical data contained in the legends of Ashoka. In Buddhist legends we read of an eclipse of the Sun—an event which seems to have coincided in time with the journey Ashoka undertook to visit certain Buddhist shrines. Scholars have ascertained that in 249 B.C., during Ashoka's reign, a solar eclipse actually took place. In one of the king's edicts issued during the twentieth year of his reign there is reference to his visit to Buddha's birthplace. All this when taken together gives us reason to assume that Ashoka's reign began in 268 B.C. Certain other source materials confirm this date: if Bindusara reigned for twenty-five years, as is stated in the *Puranas*, which contain dynastic lists, then the year 268 B.C. is the year of Ashoka's accession. Buddhist tradition has mention of the fact that the coronation of Ashoka took place 218 years after Buddha's death, which as many scholars agree might have taken place in the year 486 B.C. If one follows this tradition, we shall have the very same date for the beginning of Ashoka's reign—268 B.C.

Some scholars, it should be pointed out, favour other dates, and often refer to the mention in the Ceylonese chronicles that Ashoka was not crowned immediately after taking power, but only four years



later. On this basis they date Ashoka's accession to the year 265 B.C. The question as to the chronology of the Mauryan empire remains highly complex.

### **The Extent of the Mauryan Empire**

The Mauryan empire covered enormous territories. This single state formation embraced peoples and tribes of different ethnic origins, languages and cultures, who followed different usages, traditions and religious beliefs.

To judge by Ashoka's inscriptions and also by the *Arthashastra*, by this period there had already been established the idea of a large state headed by the ruler of the land, whose power stretched over enormous regions—from the southern ocean to the Himalayas. The authors of the political treatises had already elaborated in detail their theory with regard to the extent of the empire and its relations with other nations near and far.

The appearance of new ideas in the Mauryan period is reflected in various descriptions of King Bimbisara of Magadha and Emperor Ashoka. The former was referred to as the "*pradesha king*", i. e., king of a small territory or province, while Ashoka was regarded as the "omnipotent ruler of Jambudvipa", i. e., the whole of India.

It is the edicts of the emperor that provide the main evidence with regard to the extent of the Mauryan empire. Some information is also to be gleaned from classical authors writing of the age of Chandragupta. Information provided by Chinese travellers also has some value, particularly when it is borne out by epigraphic or archeological evidence.

Definition of the western borders of the empire has been greatly facilitated by the discovery in Kandahar—the centre of Arachosia—of the edicts of Ashoka (Greek and Greco-Aramaic inscriptions), which clearly points to the fact that Arachosia (now an area of modern Afghanistan) was part of his empire.

In Ashoka's edicts there are several references to the Yonas and Kambojas as peoples living in the west of the country.

The word Yonas is used to refer to Greeks, whose settlements were to be found in Arachosia. It was for the Greek population that versions of Ashoka's edicts were prepared in Greek. Some scholars hold that the Yonas in Ashoka's day were descendants of those Greek tribes which had settled in Arachosia at the time of Alexander of Macedon.

In Arachosia there also lived the Kambojas (an Iranian-language tribe), mentioned in ancient Indian legends as splendid horsemen and horse-breeders. The language of the Kambojas is hardly known, but because in the Aramaic version of Ashoka's edict from Kandahar we find many Iranian words, there is reason to believe that this version had been intended for the Kambojas.

An edict of Ashoka's was also found in Lampaka (near modern Jelalabad) which confirmed that Paropamisus actually was part of the Mauryan empire (this had only been gleaned before that from Greek sources telling of the results of the armistice between Chandragupta and Seleucus).

Data found in the Kashmir chronicle *Rajatarangini* and in descriptions by Chinese pilgrims give us reason to believe that part of Kashmir was also incorporated into Ashoka's empire. Tradition asserts that Shrinagar, the main city of Kashmir, was built in the reign of Ashoka. Some parts of Nepal also may have been within the confines of his empire. Epigraphic findings and written sources also indicate that Bengal was part of the empire.

When edicts issued by Ashoka were found in Southern India this facilitated the establishment of the empire's southern borders. It ran approximately south of the modern Chitaldrug district. In the south this empire bordered with the states of the Cholas, Keralaputras and Satyaputras, mentioned in Ashoka's edicts as territories outside his state. However the Mauryans maintained close contacts with these regions. Buddhist *stupas* were built there, and teachers were sent as well. Diplomatic links were also maintained with many other countries, including the Hellenistic countries to the west of India, with Sri Lanka and certain regions of Central Asia.

### **Royal Power in the Mauryan Age**

During the time of the Magadha kingdom and under the Mauryan rulers, monarchical power had been consolidated and the role of tribal institutions had gradually decreased in importance.

It was in the age of the Mauryan emperors that royal power became particularly significant. This is clear from Ashoka's edicts and the *Arthashastra*. The king was regarded as the cornerstone of the state. In the *Arthashastra* it is written: "The state is the king", which sums up the essence of the whole concept of statehood current at the time.

The principle of heredity was adhered to very strictly. Before a king died one of his sons was appointed heir to the throne (more often than not this was the eldest), although the actual attainment of power was preceded by fierce rivalry between all the king's sons.

When the new king came to the throne he performed a special consecration ceremony (known as *abhisheka*), that was marked by lavish feasts.

By the age of the Mauryan kings there had evolved the concept of *chakravartin* (literally—he who turns the wheel of power)—the single ruler, whose power stretched, as it were, over enormous territories from the Western to the Eastern Ocean, from the Himalayas to the south seas. This concept was elaborated in particular detail in the *Arthashastra*. In short it reflected a new stage

in the development of the Indian state linked with the formation of an enormous empire.

To judge by the Ashokan inscriptions the Mauryan king headed the state apparatus and possessed legislative power. Ashoka's edicts were issued at the king's command and in his name. The king himself appointed the major state officials, headed the fiscal administrative organ and was the supreme judge. In the *Arthashastra* we find detailed descriptions of the king's functions and his pastime. Particular attention was paid to the king's bodyguard, since conspiracies against the king were frequent occurrences at court. Megasthenes, ambassador at the court of Chandragupta, paid special attention to this and noted in his writings: "The king does not sleep by day and even at night he is obliged to change his resting-place from time to time for fear of evil plotting. When he sets out to hunt, the king is surrounded by women, and this entourage of women is ringed by spear-bearers. The route the procession follows is roped off on both sides. He who penetrates within the ropes where the women walk sets his life in the jaws of death."

An important role at court was that played by the king's chief priest, who always came from the influential Brahman varna.

The king personally selected his trustworthy helpers, although they too were the object of secret surveillance. The king subjected the members of his retinue to special tests. Those who failed to acquit themselves with honour ran the risk of hard labour in the mines. Thus great importance was attached to the surveillance network. Not only were officials under close watch but also the ordinary inhabitants of the towns and villages. Particular attention was paid to the activities of the king's sons, who, as we are told in the *Arthashastra*, "devour their parent like crawfish".

At night the king would receive secret agents and during the day, as we learn from the *Arthashastra*, he was occupied with affairs of state or enjoying various entertainments. The king was regarded as the supreme commander. To judge by the accounts written by Megasthenes, the number of the king's forces was amazing. In Chandragupta's military camp there were 400,000 soldiers.

### **The *Parishad* and the *Sabha***

An important function in the state administration was that of the council of the king's ministers, known as the *parishad*. This body was not initiated by the Mauryans (it had existed in earlier times), although it was precisely under the Mauryan rulers that the *parishad* assumed the functions of a political council. The *parishad* was mentioned in the emperor's edicts and its work is described in detail in the *Arthashastra* in which it is called the *mantriparishad* (the assembly of the *mantrins* or king's "ministers"). The council was required to keep

a check on the whole administrative system and the implementation of the king's orders. Apart from the *parishad* there was also a strictly secret council consisting merely of a small group of persons enjoying special trust. If there were extremely urgent matters to be settled members of both councils were known to gather together in a single body.

In the *Arthashastra* it is stressed that the number of the *parishad*'s members varied according to state requirements of the moment. During the reign of Ashoka the *parishad* was called upon to supervise the implementation of the demands of *Dharma*, and it laid down the obligations of officials undertaking tours of inspection through various parts of the country. To judge by one of Ashoka's edicts the *parishad* could meet without the king necessarily being present, although Ashoka demanded that in emergencies he should always be informed of such meetings without delay. Within the *parishad* itself heated arguments often broke out, which at times led the king to intervene. Sometimes there were differences between the king and the *parishad*; these differences assumed particularly acute form during the last period of Ashoka's reign, when opposition to the king had formed.

The *parishad*, as a political organ, consisted of nobles—from the warrior and priestly castes—who went out of their way to protect their privileges and limit the absolute power of their ruler. In earlier times, for example during the Vedic age, the *parishad* had embraced a wider range of members and as an organ of power it had been more democratic, bringing more tangible influence to bear upon the raja and his policies. Gradually the number of members decreased and membership became restricted to representatives of the aristocracy, while the role of the *parishad* was little by little reduced to purely consultative functions with the king as the final authority. However even in the Mauryan period, when royal power was particularly strong, the *parishad* retained considerable influence, and the Mauryan rulers found themselves unable to ignore it.

The *sabha* underwent similar evolution: initially it had been a broad-based assembly of nobles and representatives of the people that had carried out most important political functions. During the Mauryan age membership of the *sabha* was restricted to a much narrower section of society, and the *sabha* in its turn was reduced to a royal council—the *raja-sabha*. However, in comparison with the *parishad* the *raja-sabha* still remained a more representative organ. Certain representatives of the urban and rural population were allowed to participate in it, and in a number of cases the king found himself obliged to turn to the *raja-sabha* for support. From contemporary sources it emerges for example that Ashoka addressed the members of the *raja-sabha* in person. There is mention of the *sabha* of the Chandragupta reign in the grammatical work of Patanjali (second century B.C.).

Passages in written source materials relating to the influence of the *parishad* and the *raja-sabha* within the system of state power during the Mauryan period are of considerable interest. They show that even in periods when the monarch's power was particularly pronounced the institutions and traditions of ancient political organisation, which to a certain extent limited the king's power, were still retained.

### Taxation

The collection of taxes was regarded as one of the king's most important functions, and for this reason source materials contain detailed exposition of the underlying principles and the organisation of the system of taxation.

In the various political treatises it is stressed time and again that the treasury constituted the foundation of power, and that the king should make a point of keeping a tight control over fiscal matters.

The proportion of citizens' incomes collected as tax was extremely large, but in these treatises it is always pointed out that the king collected taxes so as to be able to protect his subjects, and that they represented a small reward for him, as it were, in recognition of his concern for the people of his lands. By the Mauryan period the old taxation system had undergone far-reaching changes. The gifts that had been offered to the king in the past, often on a voluntary basis, now took the form of compulsory commitments, of strictly fixed taxes. The main form of taxation was the *bhaga* (king's share) which usually constituted one-sixth of the agricultural produce. The king, if he so wished, could reduce this tax or even make someone exempt from it altogether, but this occurred very rarely and in special cases. The king was even referred to as the *shadbhagin* (i.e., he who receives the sixth part). Considerably larger taxes—of anything up to a quarter or even a third of the crop—could be exacted in certain areas enjoying rich soil and plentiful rain. The king's share could be increased when the state was undergoing financial difficulties.

Of interest in this connection is the somewhat unusual statement by Patanjali to the effect that the Mauryan kings "in their efforts to obtain gold installed idols". It is likely that the images referred to are representations of the gods, which were set up in special places after which the offerings brought to honour them went to the treasury. It is possible even that the Mauryan rulers simply took the idols of gods from some temples: to judge by the *Arthashastra*, during periods of financial crisis the king was permitted to take valuables belonging to the temples to fill his own coffers.

The group of subjects who had to pay the bulk of the taxes were the cultivators—the free members of the village community owning small plots of land. In addition, artisans, traders and livestock breeders also had to pay taxes to the king.

Source materials reveal that certain strata of the population were exempt from taxation. Classical authors and the ancient Indian "laws" or *Shastras* reveal that the Brahmins in their capacity as experts in the holy writings and representatives of the higher *varna* were exempt from taxation. In some writings it is even noted that exaction of taxes from experts in the Vedic texts, from hermits and the king's priests was punished by fines. Brahmin sources attempted to explain this with reference to the fact that the Brahmins through their work and religious services made a special contribution of their own, as it were, to the state treasury and promoted the country's prosperity.

Some texts include in their lists of those exempt from taxation the "king's men", i.e., those engaged in the king's service. This meant that the main burden of taxation fell on the cultivators and artisans, thus exacerbating the contradictions between the classes, estates and various social groups.

In the *Arthashastra* we find a detailed description of the functions carried out by the revenue officials and the work of the special tax department headed by the chief tax collector.

### **Administration of the Provinces**

The administration of the provinces was ordered in such a way as to respect old traditions and institutions, although the Mauryan rulers changed the system that had existed before their empire came into being, adapting it to the new conditions. New institutions for state administration were set up as well. The nucleus of the empire was the *vijita* (literally, the conquered) which incorporated the king's actual domain and certain areas subject to particularly strict control from the central administration. The empire was divided into provinces of which four enjoyed special status: the North-Western Province with its capital in Taxila, the Western Province with its capital at Ujjayani, the Eastern Province—Kalinga—with its capital in Tosali and the Southern Province with its capital of Suvarnagiri. Each of these provinces was governed by one of the king's sons: the particularly high status accorded to these territories can be attributed to their special position in the empire and to the role they played in the country's political, economic and cultural life. The creation of a special Southern Province can be accounted for by the importance of the "southern question" that had loomed large even in the time of King Bindusara. While the princes in Taxila, Ujjayani and Tosali bore the title *kumara* (a prince of ordinary status), the one who ruled in Suvarnagiri was referred to in Ashoka's edicts as *ayaputa* (the Sanskrit *aryaputra*, evidently heir to the throne) which points to his special, higher status. There is good reason to assume that in Ashoka's reign the seat of the heir was stationed there.

The main provinces enjoyed considerable autonomy. Their princes (except that of Kalinga) used to send out special inspectors to

supervise the activities of the local officials. The ruler of Kalinga however did not have this right: the emperor himself used to organise inspection tours of its territories. Ashoka dealt directly even with the local officials in Kalinga. Kalinga had only recently been annexed and although it received the status of main province it was nevertheless still seen as a conquered territory (*vijita*) and was under the direct control of the central administration.

Apart from the division of the country into four main provinces, the latter were divided into *janapadas* (ordinary provinces), *pradeshas* (regions) and *ahales* (districts). The lowest unit of provincial administration was the *gramā* (village). Important state officials known as *rajjukas* headed the *janapadas*. The word *rajjuka* means literally "holder of the cord" and this term can most likely be traced back to the original functions of these officials who were called upon to measure out the land. Later their role was enhanced and their duties became more varied. They were allotted specific judicial functions in their provinces and the former rural officials emerged as leaders of the provincial administrative apparatus. It would appear that the *rajjukas* of Ashoka's reign resemble the rural officials (or *agoranomois*) in the kingdom of Chandragupta, a detailed description of whom has been left us by the Seleucid ambassador Megasthenes. It should however be noted that by the reign of Ashoka the functions of the rural officials had changed somewhat. The *mahamatras* in charge of the *ahales* were evidently accountable to the *rajjukas*.

In the principal towns of the districts there were chancelleries where the officials gathered for regular meetings. Instructions drawn up on these occasions and copied out by scribes (or *lipikaras*) would be sent out to all parts of the district. The scribes of this period were able to write in various scripts—Brahmi, Kharoshthi, Greek.

In the edicts of Ashoka we find mention of special officials employed to guard the empire's frontiers—*antamahamatras*—who were also familiar to the author of the *Arthashastra*. They must have enjoyed fairly high status since they received a very high remuneration. Although theirs was a policy of strict centralisation, the Mauryan rulers at the same time did not embark on the elimination of many old institutions and traditions, which they saw themselves obliged to respect.

Despite their efforts to combat separatism, the Mauryan kings allowed certain of the republican formations (*ganas*) to retain their autonomous status within the empire, and in particular in those areas where it was hardest of all to effect strict control. Megasthenes refers to autonomous, independent city states in the Mauryan empire which retained many features of the old political patterns, although these *ganas* were incorporated in the overall system of imperial administration.

## Urban Administration

Some features of self-government were also retained in urban administration during the Mauryan period. In the inscriptions of Ashoka there is reference to the division of the towns into inner towns, i.e., those within the *vijita*, and external ones. The capital of the empire was Pataliputra. Megasthenes wrote of special urban officials—*astynomois*—who formed six small councils, each consisting of five men. Each council supervised one of the following spheres of the town's life: the crafts, the foreigners, the registration of births and deaths, commercial activities, the stamping of manufactured goods produced by the artisans for sale, and collection of the tax on articles sold, namely one-tenth of the purchase price. Megasthenes' account shows which questions of urban administration were the most significant, demanding special control by the authorities. The very existence of administrative councils in the towns is worthy of note. The town council was actually the main administrative organ in the town, although its members were evidently not elected, as had been the case during the Vedic period, but rather appointed or approved by the central or provincial administration.

The central administration endeavoured to deprive the town councils of their independence, yet they succeeded in retaining a certain degree of autonomy. Some towns, for instance, had their own seals, their own arms, and the town councils conducted transactions with craft guilds.

Each group of the population inhabited a specific part of the town according to *varna* and occupation, a practice which may have been a survival of an extremely ancient tradition of tribal organisation. Town officials exercised control over public buildings, the cleanliness and upkeep of the town, its holy places and temples. The majority of the buildings in the towns were made of wood, as a result of which protection against fire hazards assumed particular significance. In the summer no one was allowed to light fires and infringements of this rule were punished by large fines. All house-owners were obliged to possess fire-prevention equipment. In the *Arthashastra* we are told that tubs of water had always to be at the ready. Many vessels containing water were put out in the street. To judge by the evidence found in the *Arthashastra*, life in the towns was strictly regimented. It was forbidden to be out in the streets after a special evening signal had been given, and if anyone was bold enough to walk past the king's palace he was arrested and fined.

## Ashoka's Religious Policy

The Mauryan period was marked by wide propagation of the Buddhist faith in India. Buddhism, which had begun as a small sect of itinerant monks several hundred years before the Mauryan dynasty,



in the third century B.C. was to become one of the largest movements in the spiritual life of ancient Indian society. By that time there existed an organised Buddhist Order—*Sangha*, and the main canonical writings had been compiled. It is no accident that precisely Buddhism spread widely at that time and enjoyed support among the Mauryan rulers. Buddhism, with its ideal of an autocratic ruler—the *chakravartin*—at the head of a strong state came to provide the ideological basis for the formation of a united empire.

To judge by the various sources available Ashoka was not converted to Buddhism overnight. At his father's court he had met representatives of different schools, of orthodox and so-called heretical sympathies. Later Ashoka visited a Buddhist *Sangha*, made a close study of the fundamental teachings of Buddha and became an *upasaka*, i.e., a lay Buddhist. In his edicts he himself tells of the evolution of his beliefs. Initially the emperor did not devote particular attention to the Buddhist Order, but later, after personally acquainting himself with the life of Buddhist monks in the capital, he began actively to support the Buddhists and help their Order. His interest in Buddhist teaching and Buddhist ethical standards became particularly marked after the war with Kalinga, when the policy of *Dharmavijaya*—the propagation of the basic standards for behaviour (*Dharma*)—assumed special significance, although Ashoka had become a follower of Buddha before the war started.

While being a practising Buddhist, Ashoka in the course of his whole reign never joined the monastic order and never abandoned the reins of government to anyone else. Some scholars see Ashoka as a monk-king who at the end of his reign went off to a Buddhist monastery; however extant sources do not support this point of view. Equally unfounded is the theory that Buddhism during Ashoka's reign was a state religion.

Although Ashoka honoured the Buddhist Order with his patronage, Buddhism was not made a state religion. The salient feature of his religious policy was tolerance and he adhered to this throughout almost the whole of his reign.

In his edicts Ashoka speaks out in favour of the unity of all sects, but as something that should be achieved not through coercion, but by developing the fundamental principles of their teachings. To judge by these edicts, Ashoka presented caves to the Ajivikas, who at that time were some of the main opponents of the Buddhists and enjoyed considerable influence among the people. It also emerges from the edicts that the king used to send his representatives to communities of the Jains and to the Brahmins. There is reason to believe that Ashoka was to a certain extent obliged to pursue a policy of religious tolerance, for orthodox and heretical teachings (apart from Buddhism) were still too strong for him to do otherwise. It was precisely his policy of religious tolerance combined with skilful control exercised by the state over the life of various religious sects

which enabled Ashoka to avoid conflict with the strong stratum of Brahmans, the Ajivikas, the Jainas, and at the same time to promote Buddhism so effectively. When Ashoka abandoned this policy of religious tolerance in the last years of his reign and began to pursue an overt pro-Buddhist policy, this gave rise to determined opposition among the adherents of other religions and brought to serious consequences for the king and his administration.

At the end of his reign Ashoka was in very close contact with the Buddhist Order, and after abandoning his former principles he began even to harass the Ajivikas and the Jainas.

This seriously complicated relations between the Buddhists and the representatives of other religions at that period. Certain difficulties were to appear among the Buddhists themselves: sources from that time tell of a clash between the representatives of various schools of Buddhist thought. This made the emperor strive to keep the Buddhist Order united. He issued a special edict concerning the struggle against the dissident monks and nuns who were undermining the unity of the *Sangha*. According to this edict they were to be expelled from the Order. At the same time Ashoka recommended that Buddhist monks should make a careful study of Buddhist texts, listing a number of Buddhist canonical writings devoted in particular to questions of discipline.

According to Buddhist tradition, during the reign of Ashoka the Third Council of Buddhists took place at Pataliputra.

One of the distinctive features of Ashoka's religious policy was that he attempted to gain the support not only of the Buddhist monks but above all that of broad strata of the laity—the followers of Buddha.

In this respect we may well say that Ashoka was the first king of India who appreciated the importance of Buddhism for consolidating the empire and who encouraged its propagation. Most of his edicts were addressed not to monks, but to laymen, who, it would appear, were not well informed about the basic tenets of Buddhist doctrine and its philosophical categories. This explains why in the inscriptions there was no mention of *nirvana*, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, etc. The all-important feature was the practical implications of the inscriptions, which the emperor himself called the *Dharma* Edicts. These ethical principles that were well known to laymen, including non-Buddhists, were broadly supported among the masses and indeed various social groups.

### Ashoka's *Dharma* Edicts

*Dharma* is usually held to mean rules for man's behaviour and a righteous way of life, although the term can mean doctrine as such in the more narrow sense as associated with Buddhist teaching.

The term *Dharma* is mentioned in these two different senses in Ashoka's edicts. In most inscriptions the word *Dharma* is used to

designate a collection of moral principles, while in the strictly Buddhist edicts the term implies Buddha's teaching. These moral precepts included obedience towards parents, respect for elders, generosity, refusal to kill living creatures, etc., in other words they were concerned with standards of human behaviour that were not specifically related to Buddhism, Brahmanism or any other religious teachings. These were traditional ethical principles easily comprehended by various strata of the population regardless of their ethnic origin or religious allegiance. Some scholars mistakenly assume that these rules are strictly Buddhist religious principles, although Buddhism did in fact exert a considerable influence on the interpretation of *Dharma* to be found in Ashoka's edicts. It is revealing to note that in the Greek versions of the king's edicts the word *Dharma* is expressed via a Greek term (*eusebeia*) which conveys the idea of righteousness, *not* religious belief. It is in this general way that Ashoka presents in his edicts the question as to the results which man achieves if he consistently observes the principles of *Dharma*. The king's favour, prosperity and attainment of heaven (*svarga*) would fall to the man who was steadfast and true in his observance of *Dharma*. The last of these tenets was all too understandable to the broad masses of the population: it had been characteristic already during the Vedic age and was then taken over by the Buddhists. Yet there is no actual reference to the religious or philosophical principles of Buddhism in the edicts, since they were addressed to a broad circle of laymen adhering to various creeds. Moreover, Ashoka's *Dharma* did not conflict with some of the fundamental ethical principles upheld by the main religions of that period. The emperor referred to those principles as the essence of the teachings accepted by various sects and schools. The appeal for men to study *Dharma* is found in the edicts side by side with an acceptance and tolerance of all teachings.

The principles of *Dharma* to be found in Ashoka's edicts were designed to provide common ground for the population of the whole empire and, as it were, to take precedence over *Dharmas* of the *varnas*, associations and various social groups.

The policy aimed at propagating the principles of *Dharma*—*Dharmavijaya* (literally, victory through righteousness) constituted one of the most important parts of Ashoka's overall policy. Special officials were appointed—*Dharma-mahamatras*—to make sure that the norms of *Dharma* were observed.

These officials were sent to keep watch over the adherents of various religions. In his edicts the emperor declares outright that the *dharma-mahamatras* were supposed to ascertain how Buddhists, Brahmans, Jainas, and Ajivikas put *Dharma* into practice.

This policy made it possible to maintain control over the various groups of the population and combat separatism.

## **Ashoka Is Stripped of Power and the Empire Falls**

For any study of the latest period in the history of the Mauryan empire the Buddhist legends about King Ashoka are extremely interesting, since epigraphic sources for these years are fragmentary to say the least.

Particularly significant are the unusual accounts of the way in which Ashoka was stripped of power during the last years of his reign. These accounts are to be found in writings of several different kinds compiled over a wide range of years.

We learn that towards the end of his reign Ashoka bled the state coffers white as a result of the generous gifts he made to the Buddhist Order to promote the propagation of Buddha's teaching. At that time Ashoka's grandson Sampadi (Samprati) became heir to the throne. The king's high-ranking officials informed him of the emperor's excessive gifts to the monks and demanded that they be revoked at once. On Sampadi's orders Ashoka's instructions with regard to the offerings to the Buddhist Order were not carried out. In actual fact power was consolidated in Sampadi's hands. Ashoka, according to these sources, was obliged to make the bitter admission that his orders were no more than dead letter, and he was stripped of his kingdom and power, although formally he still remained king.

Data gleaned from Buddhist sources may well seem completely fictitious, yet in actual fact they provide what is for all intents and purposes a reliable picture of the tense political situation that obtained towards the end of Ashoka's reign. His pro-Buddhist policy gave rise to serious discontent among the followers of orthodox Brahmanism and the Jainas. To judge by a number of sources Sampadi was an adherent of Jainism and enjoyed the support of powerful court officials. By this time the country was facing economic difficulties, and uprisings were breaking out in various parts of the country, including one in Taxila—one of the largest of the period—where the local ruler led the disavowed.

Source materials tell us that Queen Tishyarakshita (who was also an opponent of Buddhism) took part in this conspiracy as well. In one of the last edicts the royal command is issued not in Ashoka's name as was the case before, but in the name of the queen. The command concerns various gifts, i.e., the very question which, according to Buddhist sources, formally led to the king and his entourage coming into conflict with each other. There is good reason to believe that the coincidence of epigraphic data and Buddhist tradition was no mere accident. It reflects the real state of affairs during the last years of Ashoka's reign.

It also emerges that Ashoka's heirs did not succeed in preserving the unity of the empire. Available sources give us reason to assume that the empire first split up into two parts: the eastern part with its centre in Pataliputra, and the western part with its centre in Taxila.

Passages in the available sources bearing on Ashoka's direct heirs contain many contradictions, but there is reason to believe that it was either Sampadi who became king in Pataliputra, or Dasharatha whom some *Puranas* present as Ashoka's son and successor. Like Ashoka, Dasharatha bore the title "dear to the gods" and patronised the Ajivikas, as can be deduced from his edicts referring to the bestowing of caves upon the latter. The next years were marked by a rapid succession of different kings on the Magadha throne, till in about 180 B.C. the last representative of the Mauryan dynasty, Brihadratha, was killed as the result of yet another conspiracy led by his commander-in-chief, Pushyamitra. The dynasty which followed was that of the Shungas, which proved unable to maintain the former greatness of the Mauryan empire. It would appear that the north-western regions and certain parts of the Deccan had been lost by the time the Shungas came to power.

Interesting information concerning the relations between the Seleucids and the Mauryan rulers towards the end of their reign is provided in the writings of Polibius. According to him the well-known Seleucid king, Antiochus the Great (223-187 B.C.), crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains after his campaigns in the East and then renewed the alliance with the Indian king Sophagasenus (evidently the Mauryan king Subhagasena). Next Antiochus was given elephants in India before marching on into Arachosia. It seems probable that by 206 B.C. the Mauryan kings were no longer in a position to withstand Antiochus' moves, as the latter marched into Arachosia. Nor is it to be ruled out that this region was no longer a part of the empire at that time. Antiochus was nevertheless obliged to take Sophagasenus into account. This is why he reinstituted the friendly relations which had existed between the Seleucid and Mauryan rulers.

### **The Shungas and the Invasion of the Indo-Greeks**

In the age of the Shungas the "Western question" became the all-important political issue. To judge by Patanjali's treatise, the *Mahabhashya*, the army of the Yavanas (the Indo-Greeks) laid siege to the Indian cities Saketa and Madhyamika. This fact is also referred to in the work *Yuga-purana*, from which it also emerges that the troops advanced from Saketa to Pataliputra, but later because of internal strife in the army itself were obliged to lift their siege on the Shungas' capital.

The invasion by the Indo-Greeks appears to have taken place in the middle of the second century B.C., during the reign of Pushyamitra. The king of the Indo-Greeks at the time was Menander.

Clashes with the Indo-Greeks also took place during the reigns of Pushyamitra's successors, in particular during that of his grandson Vasumitra, who however succeeded in securing an impressive

victory, after which relations between the Shungas and the Indo-Greeks were calm. Epigraphic evidence shows that the Greek king Antialcidas sent an embassy to the Shunga ruler Bhagabhadra. The embassy was sent to Vidisha, to which city the capital of the Shunga kings had evidently been transferred.

For over a hundred years the Shungas held on to their power. Subsequently the throne fell to the Kanvas (68-22 B.C.) under whom the process of decentralisation continued apace. Many parts of the empire broke away from the centre, and new local dynasties came into being. It is difficult to say how reliable are the accounts to the effect that the Shungas' policy was of an anti-Buddhist nature, particularly when it comes to Pushyamitra, however it is clear that at the time Buddhism no longer received the strong support it had enjoyed under Ashoka. During the period of Shunga rule the cult of Vishnu also enjoyed wide popularity as can be seen from the inscriptions of the Shunga kings. Particularly important was the cult of Vasudeva.

The *Puranas* show that the Mauryans held the throne of Magadha for 137 years. It was a period of major political events, of significant developments in the social and cultural spheres, that was to leave a deep imprint on the evolution of ancient India's society and state. The creation of a united Indian state led to interaction and communication between a variety of peoples, a cross-fertilisation of their cultures and traditions, and to a blurring of narrow tribal categories. At the same time links with other countries developed on a wider scale. During the Mauryan period Indian culture spread to the states of South-East Asia and Sri Lanka. It was at that time that the foundations of many state institutions were laid that were to develop in the years that followed.

Despite their strong army, powerful state apparatus and administrative network, despite the policy of *Dharmavijaya* directed at bringing together diverse peoples and regions, the Mauryans failed to preserve even that instable unity. The empire was a colourful assortment of tribes and peoples at very different stages of development.

#### THE DECCAN AND SOUTHERN INDIA IN THE MAGADHA AND MAURYAN PERIODS

Materials pertaining to Southern India and the states of that area, to the political, economic and cultural development in that part of the sub-continent are considerably less prolific than those bearing on the history of Northern India in the same period, i.e., the second half of the first millennium B.C. Literary sources in the local languages of Southern India only appear in the first centuries A.D., and for this reason the main source is the inscriptions found there (Prakrit and Sanskrit ones).

Ashoka's edicts contain a list of southern lands outside the limits of his empire—the kingdoms of the Pandyas, Cholas, Cheras, Satyaputras and Keralaputras. In his work dating from a somewhat earlier period Megasthenes mentions the Pandya realm, which indicates that a state must have existed there at least by the end of the fourth century B.C. It is interesting to note that writers taking part in Alexander of Macedon's campaign had heard about Southern India and even Sri Lanka. One of these, Onesicritus, recorded sea voyages to that island. During the era of the Magadha and Mauryan kings contacts between Northern and Southern India had developed on a firmer and more regular basis. In the works of the grammarians Katyayana (*circa* fourth century B.C.), and later Patanjali, references are to be found to regions of Southern India. The culture of Northern India was spreading further southwards, and economic ties were growing up. This course of events was accelerated when certain parts of Southern India became part of the Mauryan empire. In the *Arthashastra* many details concerning wares from Southern India are to be found, and also those concerning trade routes that crossed the territory.

During the rule of the Mauryan kings Buddhism began to spread to the south as is borne out by the Buddhist inscriptions dating from the third and second centuries B.C. that have been discovered in parts of the Deccan.

After the collapse of Mauryan rule a number of regions in the Deccan, that had been part of the empire, began to fight for their independence, and it was only by force of arms that the Shungas were able to pacify Vidarbha, although the southern part of that region succeeded eventually in gaining its independence.

The best known and strongest state in the Deccan in the post-Mauryan period was that of the Satavahanas, but many pages of its history remain a riddle still to be solved. Data that can be gleaned from the *Puranas* enables us to link the Satavahanas and the Andhras, who later, to judge by inscriptions, ruled over the territory on the west coast as well. The founder of the dynasty was Simuka (or Shishuka, as he is referred to in the *Puranas*) but the most powerful ruler of the early period of Satavahana history was King Satakani (or Shatakarni in the *Puranas*). During his reign the state extended its frontiers considerably and the king himself came to be known as "Lord of the Southern State". Shatakarni had to wage a struggle against a strong state on the east coast, namely Kalinga, whose king, Kharavela, advanced towards the west with his army. At that time Kalinga became one of the most powerful states in India. To judge by the Kharavela inscription found in Hathigumpha (not far from modern Bhubaneswar) the Kalingan troops emerged victorious from the struggle against the western peoples—the Bhojakas and the Rathikas. Next Kharavela led three campaigns to the north, laid siege to the ancient capital of Magadha, Rajagriha, and then advanced towards

the Ganges. The Kharavela inscription reveals that the king of Magadha, Bahasatimita, bowed to the might of the king of Kalinga. Kharavela embarked on a military expedition to the south and his army even reached the Pandya Kingdom. After the reign of Kharavela Kalinga's star was no longer in the ascendant, and indeed less and less references are to be found to it from then on.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

### Agriculture

The Magadha and Mauryan age marks a very important stage in the economic development of ancient India. At that time the main principles underlying the social and economic structure of ancient Indian society, that would subsequently be further elaborated, had taken shape. It was also blatantly clear that development in the individual regions was most uneven. One of the most economically developed centres of Northern India was the Ganges valley, where there were fertile alluvial soils and rich deposits of metals.

An important factor was the wide spread of iron, which was used both in agriculture and in crafts as well. Man started to make agricultural implements from iron, and in particular ploughshares, a development which brought about qualitative changes in both the character of agricultural work and in the results of that work. The *Sutta-Nipata*, one of the most ancient of Buddhist writings, tells of a Brahman who ploughed the land using a plough for the purpose. The ploughshare which he used (evidently one made of iron) grew so hot that he had to dip it in water. Agriculture becomes the main form of productive labour. In areas with the more fertile soils cultivators succeeded in reaping two or even three harvests a year. In Panini's grammar special terms for the spring and autumn harvests are listed. The ancient Indians were skilled cultivators and were well versed in the nature and properties of the various soils. The main cereals grown were rice, wheat and barley. Rice grains were found in the layers relating to the Magadha and Mauryan periods when archeologists excavated settlements in Northern and Central India. Particularly large territories were given over to rice cultivation in the lands of Magadha. In the Buddhist texts there are numerous references to good harvests of rice in Magadha. Patanjali also mentioned in his grammatical writings that rice was the main cereal grown in Magadha, while in the arid areas of Western India barley was the more common crop. Archeological findings and evidence gleaned from written sources show that in the western part of the sub-continent wheat and beans were also extensively sown, as well as barley. Further south where the climate is drier and the soil less fertile millet was more important.



During the Magadha and Mauryan periods irrigation also developed apace. Many sources contain mention of special canals and reservoirs built specially for irrigation purposes, and there are direct references to irrigation of fields in Magadha. Large-scale irrigation projects were organised by the state; in addition, the land was irrigated by village communities on a joint basis and also by individual farmers. In an inscription of the second century B.C. found in Saurashtra there is reference to the building of a reservoir as early as the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. Megasthenes also wrote of irrigation methods used in the Mauryan empire (more than likely they would have been near the capital); he referred to the officials employed to inspect the canals and the supply of water to the fields.

Although agriculture became the main sphere of production at this period, livestock breeding was also important. Considerable store was set by livestock since apart from its use in the fields it was also used for transport purposes. Livestock was also very important in times of war. In Buddhist writings there are references to rich owners of livestock; one rich farmer had a herd of twenty-seven thousand milking cows. In farms of that size special herdsmen and farmhands were employed to care for the cattle. As a rule, livestock was branded so as to avoid ownership disputes.

### **The Growth of Towns and the Rise of Handicrafts**

A distinctive feature of life in the Magadha and Mauryan periods was the growth of towns, which were becoming centres of craftsmanship and trade, although a large section of the population still lived in the villages.

Archeological findings show that the most rapid expansion of towns took place between the sixth and third centuries B.C. That was the time when urban fortifications were built and town-planning was underway, although towns differed sharply one from another. Pataliputra was built in the shape of a parallelogram, Kaushambi in the form of a trapezium, Shravasti was triangular in shape and Vaishali rectangular. The town that was biggest in size and had the largest population was the imperial capital Pataliputra. According to data quoted by Megasthenes, who lived in the capital, it must have occupied an area of over twenty-five square kilometres. If these data are taken as reliable, Pataliputra must be regarded as one of the largest cities of ancient times. Alexandria was only a third the size, and the well-known Indian city of Kaushambi—the capital of the state of Vatsa—was eleven times smaller. Megasthenes wrote that in the imperial capital there were 570 towers and that more than sixty gates led into the city.

The main building material was still wood. It was only on rare occasions that stone was used. Even Ashoka's royal palace was made

of wood, as excavations have shown. Wood was subjected to special processing that preserved it from decay in the course of many centuries. When the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien arrived in Pataliputra six centuries after the reign of Ashoka he was quite amazed by the grandiose building and wrote that it must have been built by gods, rather than men. The techniques used to preserve the wood and the building methods have also made a deep impression on archeologists who first started investigating the remains of the royal palace at the beginning of this century.

Craftsmanship also achieved a high level at this time, particularly weaving, metal-working and jewellery. The finest fabrics were held to be the cottons woven in Varanasi, Mathura and Ujjayani. Fabrics were exported to the West via Barygaza. Gandhara was famous for its woolen materials.

The *Arthashastra* tells of the special royal workshops where metal was processed and over which state officials exercised strict control. Apart from the royal armouries, there were also metal craftsmen who had their own undertakings and carried out commissions. In the villages potters, carpenters and blacksmiths were held in particularly high esteem.

Craftsmen had their own guilds known as *shreni*. In some respects they were independent and they had their own charter. The artisans who belonged to a given guild were obliged to abide by the charter, and when necessary the guild would come out in support of its members. The state tried to establish control over the activities of the guilds, demanded that they register and forbade them to transfer from one region of the country to another without notifying the authorities.

### **Trade. The Appearance of Coins**

Merchants had similar organisations. Like the artisans they were specialised. The merchants of each particular region engaged in selling one specific type of ware. During the reigns of the Magadha and Mauryan kings a more extensive network of communications between the various regions grew up, roads were built and special trade routes established between the capitals of the various states. The most famous of these were the Northern and Southern Highways. Megasthenes wrote of the Royal Highway which stretched all the way from the north-western frontier to Pataliputra and then still further east.

Apart from overland trade, river and sea routes also came to be used. Source materials tell of Indian merchants undertaking dangerous sea voyages that lasted for as long as six months. Vessels set out for Sri Lanka, Burma and Southern Arabia. Many Indian wares were

dispatched to the Hellenistic countries: spices, precious stones, articles fashioned from ivory, as well as rare kinds of wood.

At about the same time money appeared and started to circulate, initially as pieces of metal, which gradually assumed a specific shape and came to bear various symbols and inscriptions.

In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. punch-marked coins appeared, for the most part of copper or silver. In the areas which had been incorporated into the Achaemenid empire Persian sigloi started to circulate, and Greek tetradrachms were the unit of exchange in the north-west.

The punch-marked coins unearthed by archeologists in layers relating to the Mauryan period are distinguished by a number of recurrent symbols which may have been emblems of the Mauryan kings. Written sources record the names of various coins: karshapanas (silver and copper), kakanis (copper), suvarnas (gold).

The *Arthashastra* also lists the duties of the officials who had to supervise the minting of coins and money circulation. At that stage the concepts of credit, interest and pawning were already known.

### Landownership

In the second half of the first millennium B.C. the system of private landownership was further developed. The ancient Indians had clearly appreciated the difference between ownership of land and use of land, having separate terms for these notions. The concept of ownership was linked with the possessive pronoun *sra* and its derivatives. The verb *bhuj* (to use or to enjoy) was used to designate temporary possession as well as the related terms *bhoga*, *bhukti*, etc. In the *Sutras* and *Shastras* cases are recorded when men became property owners after purchasing or discovering land; at the same time it is pointed out that only after legal confirmation and on a basis of legal rights could an individual start to own what he has previously been using. These principles applied, among other things, to land. Farming land is listed among the main types of property in the *Manava Dharmashastra* (second century B.C. to the second century A.D.).

The lands of the country were divided into several categories—private, communal and royal.

Among the private landowners there also existed a number of different categories: apart from rich landowners there were also the poor owners of small plots. Some estates were so large that their tilling required several hundred ploughs. In such estates the cultivation work was carried out by slaves and hired labourers.

While the large estates reached the size of 1,000 *karisas* (one *karisa* amounts to about 0.25 hectares), there also existed extremely small holdings. The owners of the small plots worked them themselves,

with the help of their families. Property rights were protected; illegal appropriation of the land belonging to somebody else was made subject to large fines and such violators would be publicly branded as thieves. According to the *Shastras* appropriation of land was subject to the same fines as those for theft. Interference in the affairs of a landowner was prohibited. In the *Manava Dharmashastra* it is written that if a man who owns no plot of his own has seed and sows it in someone else's field, then he has no right to the harvest. Only the owner of a plot of land could decide questions connected with his land, which he could sell, give away, mortgage or lease out. Indian sources contain references to a Brahman giving away part of his land, to a merchant purchasing an orchard from the king's heir, etc. Thus, Diodorus' statement (that can perhaps be traced back to Megasthenes) that no private individual is allowed to own land contradicts materials in local sources and does not reflect the actual state of affairs at the time.

The *Narada smṛiti* (fourth or fifth century A.D.) contain a rule according to which the king was not allowed to violate the foundations of private ownership, i.e., to encroach upon the house or plot of land belonging to a private individual; however the monarchy sought to limit the rights of the property owners. The king levied taxes on the land of private owners and naturally he kept a careful check on the condition of land. If an individual landowner abandoned his plot at sowing or harvest time, then the king could exact a fine from him. The state also exacted fines from those who failed to pay their taxes, and that was an accepted part of its administrative role; however the state did not have the right to confiscate land from private owners. In the *Bṛhaspati smṛiti* (third and fourth centuries A.D.) attention is drawn to the fact that if the king were to take away privately owned land from one owner and donate it to another he would be acting against the law. The state made sure that rules concerning the sale of land were observed and, if violations did occur, fines were levied.

The village community, like the state, endeavoured to limit private ownership of land, particularly the sale of land to those who were not members of the community. When land was sold pre-emption was given to relatives and neighbours. Their opinions were also taken into account above all when borders between villages and plots of land were disputed. The community also protected the rights of landowners from among its members. The community itself was responsible for the jointly owned lands: grazing grounds, buildings and roads within the communal lands.

Part of the nation's land consisted of state lands and the king's personal possessions. State lands included forests, mines and fallow land. Within the king's territorial possessions (*svabhūmi*) were the royal estates (*sita*). Specially appointed overseers supervised the running of the royal estates. The king was also permitted to own small

tracts of land in the villages. These plots he disposed of as his own: he could donate them, sell them or lease them out. He could do all this, if he so chose, with the lands of the royal estates as well. The estates were worked by slaves and hired labourers, and also various categories of tenant farmers. Some of them worked in return for half the crop, and others were allowed to retain no more than a quarter. In addition there were also tenant farmers working on state land: they were given temporary use of their plots. The position of the tenant farmers on the state land was better than that of those working on the king's estates. Natural resources were regarded as the property of the state, which also had a monopoly over mining. In sources from this ancient period (particularly the *Arthashastra*) a clear distinction is drawn between two categories of land in accordance with the revenues derived from each: the *sita* was levied from the king's land and the *bhaga* was the tax on private estates.

These differences were not appreciated by Megasthenes, who held that all land in India belonged to the king. Evidently this ambassador, living as he did in the capital, was best acquainted with the royal estates and mistakenly equated their administration with that of land throughout India.

As was pointed out earlier, the king did not own all the cultivated land in the state. In ancient Indian writings it is plainly noted that the king levied taxes not in the capacity of a landowner but as the state's sovereign protecting the population of his kingdom. In the *Manava Dharmashastra*, for example, it was stated that if the king levied taxes without protecting his subjects, then he would go to Hell without delay; a king of this type is referred to in one of the ancient epics as "having stolen one-sixth of the harvest".

The complex picture of social relations, and also the data in written sources with regard to the various types of landownership explain why scholars have put forward a variety of hypotheses with reference to the nature of landownership in ancient India. Some historians believed that there was no private ownership, that the king was the supreme landowner or that there was a system of communal ownership. However, source materials indicate that in ancient India there *did* exist various forms of landownership, when landed plots were sometimes the property of several co-owners, so to speak. Moreover, it would hardly be right to expect an unequivocal answer to the question as to the nature of landownership, when we are dealing with such enormous territories as those which made up the Mauryan empire.

In the Ganges valley and in Magadha where the king's power was particularly great, the king's estates and large landed estates had a more important role to play than communal property, while in the north-western part of the country the traditions of communal ownership were stronger.

## The Village Community in Ancient India

One of the most important elements in the social and economic pattern of the Magadha and Mauryan age was the village community. It embraced a significant section of the population: the free members of the village community—the cultivators. Unfortunately, the sources relevant to the nature of the village community, its structure and its composition are far from numerous, but they point to the fact that the most widespread form of the community at the time was the village community, although in backward regions of the empire there still existed primitive forms of the village community based on the clan. In source materials village communities are referred to by the term *grama*. However, the meaning of this term is far wider. Sometimes there is mention of thirty families who live in the village, however the number might stretch to as many as one thousand. Each village community—or *grama*—had its limits fixed. The farming land was divided up into plots that belonged to the free members of the village community—the cultivators. Apart from the tax that had to be paid to the king by the owners of plots within the village community's boundaries a joint tax, evidently collected from the jointly owned land, was also levied.

Stratification based on property ownership was already firmly established: apart from the members of the village community who worked on their own plots, there had evolved a village community elite who used slaves or hired labourers to work their plots. Some members of the village community fell victim to poverty, lost their land and farming implements, thus being obliged to work as tenant farmers. The lowest stratum of the village community constituted the exploited group. As a rule they did not possess any means of production. Village artisans also fell into several categories. Some of them worked on their own in their own workshops, while others hired themselves out for a specific remuneration. The combination of the handicrafts and land cultivation created a system of barter in services between the members of the village community. This was a special feature of the ancient Indian village community, and partly goes to explain its inward-looking, patriarchal character.

The village community still retained certain features of a close-knit collective with old-time common traditions. Buddhist writings tell of the joint work in road cleaning and reservoir construction. Free members of the village community celebrated their festivals together including religious ones. In the *Arthashastra* it is stated that if anyone refused to take part in some social function he would be fined. The village community as a whole could make contact with other village communities or with the king. The village community defended the rights of the free members. "The village community (like the state), on the one hand, is the mutual relationship between these free and equal individual property owners, their union against the outside world; at

the same time it is also their guarantee.”\* To a certain extent the village community was independent as far as its internal affairs were concerned. The freemen gathered together to resolve various questions of administration, although the heads of the villages were gradually assuming a more and more prominent role. The head of the village community was first elected at an assembly of all members and then approved by the state authorities, thus becoming its representative. Only the free members of the village community had the right to vote while the slaves, servants and hired workers were bereft of all political rights. For a long period the village communities were isolated one from the other, remaining self-sufficient institutions, although gradually they became less self-contained and inward-looking.

### Slavery and Its Specific Features

In the Magadha and Mauryan age slavery developed rapidly, as compared to its slow beginnings during the Vedic period. Although the sources of the time are not very rich in information pertaining to slaves and the use of slave labour, it is possible to glean a general picture of slave-ownership in ancient India and the role that slavery played in the structure of society. Unfortunately, insufficient attention has been paid to the question of slavery in ancient India by either West European or Indian scholars. However in recent years the position has changed somewhat; specialised works on this important question have come out (valuable research in this field is that undertaken by Soviet Indologists, in particular G.F. Ilyin).

When considering the question of slavery, even in relation to this specific period of ancient Indian history — namely, the second half of the first millennium B.C. — it is important to bear in mind the varying levels of social relations obtaining in different parts of the enormous empire, the complex patchwork of social institutions, uneven rates of progress, etc. Most sources provide details relating to slaves and the way they were used in the Ganges valley and adjacent territories. The conclusions drawn from these data apply in the main to Magadha and certain other of the more developed regions.

In early Buddhist writings and certain other texts slaves were defined as men dependent on other of their fellow-men. The slave was seen as a thing, or as a variety of a domestic animal. In the early epics a man who had become a slave was referred to as a farm animal, in the same breath as cows, goats, sheep, or horses. In the *Dharmasutras* rules were laid down for the inheritance of slaves, together with other property of the deceased. Slaves, like livestock and precious metals, were divided up among the heirs.

Various sections of the population owned slaves. They were to be found at court, in the houses of prosperous citizens, and in village

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\* *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, 1857-1858*, Moskau, 1939, S. 379.

communities. A slave could not have any say in his own destiny; he could be given away, sold, pawned or lost over a game of dice. In Buddhist written sources we find frequent references to the current prices for slaves, which varied according to their health and skills. In some texts slaves are referred to as the two-legged ones, so as to distinguish them from the four-legged animals. The lot of the slave was far from easy. Buddhist texts tell how they worked in constant fear of punishment, goaded on by iron rods, some even in fetters. Their food often consisted of no more than thin soup.

Slaves fell into various categories, according to the way in which they had been acquired. In one of the first extant classifications three types of slaves are listed: those who were born in the household, those who were bought, and those who were brought in from another country (evidently prisoners of war). Gradually this list grew to include new types. Rules for the freeing of slaves also come to be formulated. Although it was up to the master to decide whether or not a slave was to be set free, in certain conditions and for a certain price slaves (especially temporary ones) could purchase their freedom.

Considerable attention is devoted to the question of slavery by Kautilya, the author of the *Arthashastra*. He draws a clear distinction between those who were slaves for life and temporary slaves, referring to all manner of cases that could shield free Aryans from being reduced to the status of slaves. According to the *Arthashastra* the slave-owner would even be fined if he did not free a temporary slave after receiving the fixed redemption fee. The author of the *Arthashastra* did not regard the descendants of temporary slaves as slaves. This differed from the regulations stipulated in earlier texts, according to which the children of a slave-woman would fall into the category of slaves. Kautilya came out in defence of the interests of those representatives of the higher *varnas*, who by a twist of fate found themselves in bondage. He did not allow the temporary slaves to be assigned with the dirty work. In the *Arthashastra* we are told that a slave was allowed to have property, but later *Shastras* elaborated a rule according to which a slave was not only forbidden to have property of his own but was also obliged to hand over everything he earned to his master.

The *Arthashastra* reflected the state's attempt to introduce some order and clarity in the status of slaves and a measure of precision into these matters which had assumed great importance by the time.

One of the most important questions connected with the place of slaves in the overall structure of society is that as to the role of slave labour in production, in the basic spheres of economic activity.

Source materials note that slave labour was used in agriculture. Slaves were also used on the royal estates, where, according to evidence from the *Arthashastra*, sowing was a task set aside for the slaves or hired labourers and men "working off" fines. Slaves were



also used in large private farms. They ploughed the soil, sowed, and brought in the harvest. In the *Jatakas* there are references to slaves who together with hired workers cut down trees thus clearing the land for sowing. The owners of small plots of land sometimes also owned slaves, but not of course in any great numbers. In the *Jatakas* references are most frequently made to families with one man-slave or one slave-woman. Slaves could not become members of a Buddhist community, but the *sangha* employed workmen whose status was virtually identical to that of the slave; they worked estates belonging to monasteries or carried out various other tasks. Slave labour was also encountered in the handicrafts, although references to it are rare.

Specific features of slavery as found in ancient Indian society were first and foremost its immaturity and its patriarchal character. Slave labour came very close to the labour of free hired labourers. It is revealing to note that in many sources containing references to slave labour, it is mentioned on a par with the labour of hired labourers. The *Arthashastra* even brackets together in a single group the status of slaves and that of the *karmakaras* (hired labourers).

Another feature of slavery was the wide use of slave labour in the household, which loomed very large in the life of the ancient Indians. Written sources contain frequent examples of the special terms used to designate various types of house-slaves: *ghara-dasa*, *griha-dasa*, *geha-dasa* (*dasi*). The use of slave labour in the household led to a patriarchal note in the relations between master and slave and gave rise to the idea that slavery as a whole was of an extremely mild character. It was possibly this which led to Megasthenes' mistaken statement to the effect that all Indians were free and not one of them was a slave.

Taken all in all, slavery, although it possessed a number of specific characteristics in the ancient Indian context (patriarchal overtones, proximity of slave labour to that of free producers, the existence of undeveloped economic forms), played an important part in the overall structure of society in the Magadha and Mauryan age. In Magadha, the most advanced part of the country where there were enormous royal estates and where there was a considerable number of large, privately owned estates, it was evidently the socio-economic formation based on slave-ownership that was dominant in the complex social structure.

Although the labour of free members of village communities, tenant farmers and hired labourers played a dominant role in the main spheres of production, slavery represented a progressive phenomenon in comparison to primitive society, and it exerted a powerful influence on society as a whole. Slavery was not the only form of exploitation, yet at the same time it was the most important one. In the period under consideration slavery was on the increase.

## The Karmakaras

In the era of the Magadha and Mauryan kings wide use was made of hired labourers. These labourers or *karmakaras* were to be found in various spheres of production—in agriculture (on royal and private estates and in the village community), in artisans' workshops and in trading. The number of *karmakaras* swelled when it was time to sow the seed or gather in the crops, in other words, when labour was scarce. The *karmakaras* were to be found both in the villages and in the towns. As a rule they did not possess any means of production and hired themselves out for set wages, or in return for food.

The *karmakaras* worked both on the king's estates and in the private farms of the rich, tilling the fields and tending livestock; the village communities also had cause to resort to the assistance of hired labourers. They would work in the fields, execute irrigation projects or tend grazing livestock. A special overseer would allocate to such *karmakaras* as had worked in the king's estates implements and livestock.

The position of the hired labourers was extremely difficult, but those who worked on the king's estates were better provided for. To judge by evidence found in the *Arthashastra*, the *karmakaras* who tilled the land used to receive a tenth of the harvest, while those tending livestock would be given one-tenth of the butter and milk from the cows they herded. Although the *Arthashastra* laid down specific conditions for the conclusion of agreements concerning the implementation of work, in practice everything depended upon the employer or master. The food the *karmakaras* ate was not very different from that of the slaves. Their difficult position often led them to hire themselves out on almost any conditions. The *Arthashastra* tells how rural labourers gathered up cereal plants in the fields that had been left behind by the harvesters.

As far as their place in the *varna* pattern was concerned, hired labourers were usually ranked among the *shudras*, but it is possible that their number included free village farmers and artisans who though now impoverished actually belonged to the *vaishya* estate.

## The Social Division and Caste System

During the Magadha and Mauryan periods not only had the *varna* and caste systems evolved, but it had also become a leading element in the structure of society. The division of society into *varnas* existed side by side with the fundamental division into classes.

In the *Majjhima-Nikaya*—part of the Buddhist canon—India is compared with neighbouring regions, including those populated by Greeks and Kambojas living in Arachosian territory. In those lands,

we are told, society consisted of freemen and slaves, while in Indian society there were also the four *varnas*.

Much of the data to be found in source materials shows that the *varna* a man belonged to determined to a large degree the place of the free Indian in society. However at that time property status as opposed to origins was coming to play a more and more important part. It is stressed that wealth brings man fame and respect.

Brahman and Buddhist texts present the overall pattern of the *varna* system in different ways: in Brahman writings it is the Brahmans who come first, then the *kshatriyas*, while in the Buddhist texts the Brahmans take second place to the *kshatriyas*. It is possible that the Buddhist texts not only reflect the Buddhist view of the *varna* system but also those changes that had by this time taken place within the pattern of social division.

An interesting view of the *varna* system under the Mauryan kings is provided in the writings of Megasthenes who himself was able to observe first-hand this system and the relations between representatives of the various *varnas*. Megasthenes divided the whole population of India into seven groups (parts): philosophers, farmers, herdsmen and hunters, artisans and traders, soldiers, overseers, councillors and assessors. Megasthenes based his classification on professional attributes, although representatives of all four *varnas* were included in his pattern. His list like those in the Brahman texts is headed by the Brahmans, which points to the fact that he is adhering to Brahman traditions.

During the reign of the Magadha and Mauryan kings the Brahmans retained their high position. Their influence was particularly strong in the sphere of ideology and religious practice. The main advisers at court and in the law-courts were also Brahmans. Many of them were very rich and owned large landed estates. The position of the Brahmans in Magadha and Kosala was relatively strong, since they owned large tracts of land there.

New conditions left their mark on the position of the Brahmans within the structure of the social hierarchy. They were obliged to change their traditional offices. Written sources of the period already contain mention of Brahman landowners, traders, artisans and servants. While in earlier Brahman sources the Brahmans were only allowed to take up farming and trade in extremely rare cases, now Brahman laws permitted members of that *varna* to take up the occupations of other *varnas*, the *kshatriyas* and *vaishyas*. Buddhist sources even mention Brahman servants, woodcutters, shepherds, poor peasants. They were evidently obliged to turn to occupations which they themselves regarded as unworthy of a Brahman in view of their difficult position. In such cases Brahmans were deprived of a privilege as significant as exemption from taxes.

Political power was in the hands of the *kshatriyas* whose influence was enhanced to a large degree after the strong Mauryan empire had been established. The kings as a rule were of *kshatriya* origin, and the army was in their hands. The power of the *kshatriyas* was particularly significant in the republics. In the Magadha and Mauryan times the *kshatriyas* also gained major economic privileges: many of them became owners of large estates. While previously the Brahmins had enjoyed unlimited power in the ideological sphere, now it was the *kshatriyas* who came to claim an independent role in that sphere.

Eminent political figures in ancient India came out in favour of an alliance of the *kshatriyas* and the Brahmins. The author of the *Arthashastra* wrote that the power of the *kshatriyas* guided by the Brahmins was invincible and would remain so forever. In many written sources the first two *varnas* were contrasted with the two lower ones. It became common practice to bracket together the *vaishyas* and *shudras* so to speak. At the same time the more prosperous *vaishyas* came to have more in common with the higher *varnas*, and the impoverished ones were in practical terms reduced to *shudra* status. These developments followed in the wake of the rise of trade and the handicrafts. The main occupations of the *vaishyas* were agriculture, the handicrafts and commerce. Theirs was the social group that bore the bulk of the tax burden, but among the rich *vaishyas* were powerful merchants known as *setthi*, money-lenders and landowners. During the Magadha and Mauryan periods the political role of the *vaishyas* was in decline, and they virtually lost their right to possess weapons.

The position of the *shudras* at this time remained virtually unchanged and only a few of them succeeded in attaining wealth through trade or craftsmanship which improved their status in society.

This was the picture proffered by the social structure in the monarchies of ancient India during the second half of the first millennium B.C. The social organisation of the republican states of the same period presented a somewhat different picture however. (See "The Republics of Ancient India".)

### **The Family and Forms of Marriage**

In the Magadha and Mauryan age the main form of the family was the large patriarchal family. In several regions, apart from monogamous relationships, there were also more archaic forms of marriage to be found. The husband was the head of the family. Gradually certain changes came about in the position of women, who eventually became fully dependent upon their spouses and sons. Marriage was turned into a sort of property deal. The man purchased

his wife, as it were, and she became his chattel. Source materials tell of wives being sold or lost in the course of gambling.

The woman's position was an extremely hard one. In childhood she was expected to be completely in the power of her father, during her youth in that of her husband, and after the death of her husband in the power of her sons: this is how a woman's lot is described in the *Manava Dharmashastra*. Wives are to be patient even unto death and strictly observe their obligations. The *Manava Dharmashastra* demanded that a wife respect her husband as a god, even if he possessed no virtues. Only husbands were able to divorce their spouses. A wife was unable to abandon her family. Even if her husband sold her or left her she would still be regarded as his wife. An unfaithful wife would be subjected to most terrible punishments, including death. A man could have several wives and this would not be considered a sinful action. According to tradition, a wife had to belong to the same *varna* as her husband. Only in rare cases were men allowed to marry a wife from a lower *varna*, but a woman from a high *varna* was forbidden to marry a man from a lower *varna*. The most serious crime of all was held to be the marriage between a *shudra* and a Brahman woman. A father's power over his children was decisive and final. In the Brahman "laws" it was stated outright that a father could give his children away if he so desired.

The *Shastras* list eight forms of marriage, but it is difficult to say to what extent they were all actually spread. These forms were as follows: the giving of a daughter (the Brahma marriage), the giving of a daughter to a priest (the *Daiva* marriage), the purchasing of a bride for a cow or bull (the *Arsha* marriage), marriage on equal terms (the Prajapatya marriage), the purchasing of a bride at an agreed bride-price (the *Asura* marriage), the abduction of a bride (the *Rakshasa* marriage), the seizing of a bride by force while she is asleep (the *Paishacha* marriage), and the voluntary union (the *Gandharva* marriage).

To judge by later sources extremely archaic customs inherited from the past were to predominate in marriage and family relations over a very long period. In accordance with the Brahman "laws" or *Shastras*, for instance, if a husband died without leaving any children, his wife, if her husband's relatives so demanded, was obliged to bear children by her husband's brother or other close relative.

These rules can be traced back to ancient practices linked with the principle of preserving clan property. Marriages between blood relatives were forbidden up to and including those seven times removed.

## THE REPUBLICS OF ANCIENT INDIA

### *Ganas and Sanghas*

In the history of ancient India in the Magadha and Mauryan times the republican unions, indicated by the terms *gana* and *sangha* in Indian sources, played a considerable role. These unions waged a resolute struggle against the monarchies and on a number of occasions secured impressive victories. Buddhist sources even list some republican states among the "great lands".

The term *gana* embraces a multitude of meanings. During the Vedic age it was used to denote tribal formations; later *ganas* and *sanghas* came to be understood as unions of a non-monarchical type at a different level of development. The grammarian Panini (fifth and fourth centuries B.C.) refers to several types of *sanghas*: *sanghas* living by force of arms, namely military associations, and *sanghas* where the development of statehood had reached an extremely advanced stage. In various Buddhist writings a distinction is drawn between two types of state, namely monarchies ruled over by one man or lands ruled over by a *gana*. While in states of the first type all power was centred in the hands of one man, in the *ganas* (as is pointed out in one of the texts in question) even a decision taken by ten men might be reviewed by twenty, i. e., depend upon the opinion of the majority. It is significant that the ancient Indians did not consider the *gana* as the ruling authority with a monarch absent merely temporarily. Moreover they contrasted these two forms of power—the monarchy and the republic—pointing out that in their respective lands both the king and the *gana* possessed exclusive authority as the wielders of supreme power.

Classical authors—men who had taken part in Alexander's campaign and the ambassador Megasthenes—had been aware of the existence of unions that were not monarchies. Unions that in Indian sources were included in the group of *ganas* or *sanghas* were referred to as autonomous and independent. These unions had no royal power, and their leader was elected.

Both classical and Indian sources depict these non-monarchical unions as flourishing lands with a smoothly running system of administration and a high level of culture.

### **The System of Administration**

The most advanced of the *ganas* and the *sanghas* during the Mauryan period were states where there was no monarch with undivided power, that is they were, in other words, republics, although the forms of republican rule within them were not always the

same. The feature common to these republics was the absence of a hereditary ruler with undivided power. The head of state was usually elected (or appointed) by the *gana*, and when necessary he could be replaced by the *gana*. The Buddhist work *Chivaravastu* contains a very interesting description of the *gana* of the Lichchhavis, one of the most powerful republican states in Northern India. It tells how the head of the *gana* was elected after the death of the leader. The main condition was that the candidate should be a man of merit. The *gana* appointed a candidate declaring that it reserved the right to remove him if he did not gain the *gana*'s approval for his actions. The leader of the *gana* enjoyed mainly executive power, while legislative power was the domain of the *gana* in its capacity as the supreme organ of power (thus it can be seen that the *gana* was regarded both as a state with a non-monarchical system of government, and as the state's supreme organ of power).

The *gana* adopted major decisions in the form of resolutions obligatory for all citizens including the most influential among their number. Whoever presumed to break those laws was punished with a severe fine. On occasions the offender was even given the death penalty. The *gana* appointed its own officials who were regarded as its representatives.

In certain republics the *gana* constituted a kind of popular assembly for all free citizens enjoying full rights. When decisions were taken these were determined by the opinion of the majority. The composition of the *gana* and its role as the supreme organ of power determined to a large extent the nature of those republican states. In those instances when the popular assembly retained its leading role and was made up of citizens enjoying full rights the republic might be termed democratic, although even in these cases the council of the nobility began to gain in importance. Certain political unions represented a transitional form of state from a democratic to an aristocratic republic. In other cases, where the popular assembly had already lost its dominant importance and real power was concentrated in the hands of the aristocratic council of the *kshatriyas*, the republics were of an aristocratic type.

### **The Power of the *Kshatriyas* and the Social Structure**

In the *ganas* and the *sanghas* the *kshatriyas* formed the dominant stratum of society, separate from the rest of the population. This explains why many of the non-monarchical unions were referred to as *kshatriyan*. In the aristocratic republics a special status was enjoyed by the wealthier and more influential *kshatriyas* who bore the title of *raja*. In order to attain this title a man had to go through a special ceremony of initiation in a holy pool. Any illegal performance of this rite was subject to death penalty, even for a *kshatriya*.

The *kshatriyas* who possessed the title *raja* met in a special hall—the *santhagara*—where they deliberated the most important questions of administration. Representatives of other *varnas*, even the Brahmans, were not allowed to be present at these meetings. It is most probable that in some republics the deliberation of various questions began in the popular assembly and then the council of *rajas* would make their final decision. The relations between these two institutions depended entirely on the nature of the power in the republic concerned. Dignitaries of state too were evidently appointed from the ranks of the *kshatriyas*—army commanders, judges, etc.

Practices inherited from the age of tribal or clan relations were still very strong within the social structure of the *ganas* and *sanghas*, even in the most advanced among them. For example, the influence of the *gotra* (or clan) still made itself felt, although the *kula* (or family) was now emerging as the main unit.

A highly distinctive feature of the *ganas* and *sanghas* was the pattern of *varna* and caste division. In this respect the *kshatriyas* were set apart from the rest of the population, and even the Brahmans could achieve a position equal to theirs only in extremely rare cases. While in the monarchies it was above all the Brahmans who owned large landed estates, in the republics the *kshatriyas* established themselves as influential landowners. They also held most of the political power. Here the Brahmans were unable to claim priority, as they did in the monarchies, and often they were reduced to a status that came close to that of the privileged group of *vaishyas*. Despite specific features of the *varna* structure, in the republics as in the monarchies the most oppressed *varna* was that of the *shudras*. This shows that the form of political power did not determine the social structure.

The all-important characteristic of the political organisation to be found in the *ganas* and *sanghas*, which distinguished them from the monarchies, was that broad strata of the population were involved in political affairs, a fact which made them firm and durable unions. The author of the *Arthashastra* held that the *sanghas* were invincible due to their cohesion. Despite a certain degree of democratism the republics constituted societies with acute class, ownership and social contradictions. Written sources refer to the clashes between the influential, i.e., the *kshatriya* members, and the common members of the *ganas* and *sanghas*. The *Mahabharata* calls the internal contradictions the main enemy of the *ganas* and *sanghas*. In the Buddhist canon there is even mention of an open revolt of the slaves in the republic of the Shakyas.

The ancient Indian republics survived the age of the Mauryans and continued to exist right up until the era of the Guptas, when gradually they began to lose their independence and were subdued by monarchies. Study of the republican systems of ancient India reveals that it is ill-advised to contrast the political systems of ancient India



and the Mediterranean countries in classical times. In India, as also in the classical civilisations, a similar process of development was to be observed, from a classless society to a state; in this context a state could adopt either a monarchical or republican form of government depending upon a whole range of conditions.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MAURYAN ERA

### The Spread of Writing

The age of the Magadha and Mauryan kings was a period of rapid cultural development. To judge by the Ashokan inscriptions found in many regions of India, and also in the territory of modern Afghanistan, writing was fairly widespread as early as the third century B.C. However, there is little doubt that it existed several centuries earlier as well. In many Buddhist writings there are references to an exchange of letters, to the recording of royal decrees, to scribes and the study in schools of the art of writing alongside with arithmetic.

In Panini's grammar there are special terms to denote script and scribes, and also references to the Greek script. Ashokan inscriptions were in the Brahmi script, and also in the Aramaic, Greek, and Kharoshthi scripts, the latter having evolved from Aramaic under the influence of Brahmi. Most of the inscriptions however were in Brahmi. According to reports by Nearchus, the ancient Indians at the period of Alexander's Indian campaign wrote on cotton fabric. It is possible that the most widespread material for writing on was palm leaves but because of the damp climate those written sources have not been preserved. The only testimony to the epistolary art of that era is provided by the Ashokan edicts inscribed on rock, pillars and cave walls. By the third century B.C. Brahmi was already a script with a long history behind it.

There is no consensus of opinion among the experts as to the origins of the Brahmi script. It was regarded as linked with the script of the Harappan civilisation, with the Semitic script, with that used in Southern Arabia, and even Greek. Inscriptions dating from the second century B.C. show that there were several versions of the Brahmi script at that period. In the Buddhist writing, *Lalitavistara*, that dates from the beginning of the first century A.D. and tells of the life of Buddha, sixty-four different types of script are mentioned, which include local Indian scripts and foreign ones as well. Ashoka's edicts were addressed not only to state officials, but also to the common people—representatives of the various social groups who were expected to be able to read his decrees. Among the inscriptions of the second and first centuries B.C. a considerable number are dedications, providing, as it were, a register of the gifts offered to the Buddhist *sangha*. These inscriptions were made on behalf of traders, Buddhist monks, artisans, etc. All this points to the fact that

the ancient Indians of the third, second and first centuries B.C. were to a large extent familiar with the written word. It should however not be forgotten that the system of education in ancient India was based on an oral tradition, on the learning by heart of sacred texts, which were passed down from generation to generation.

### **The Growth of Scientific Knowledge**

The Magadha and Mauryan age was notable for a marked advance in scientific knowledge. It was at this time that many scientific treatises were created relating to astronomy, mathematics, medicine and grammar, although they were actually written down later. An enormous number of religious writings by Buddhists and Jainas also date from this period. Modern scholars also regard the life and writings of the famous Indian grammarian Panini, who compiled a detailed grammar of Sanskrit, as dating from the fifth or fourth centuries B.C. His work was entitled *Ashtadhyayi* (Eight Chapters). The methods used to analyse language were of a very high calibre. Panini based himself on the works of certain predecessors, whose names are mentioned in his grammar. This grammar became, as it were, a yardstick for later Sanskrit grammarians, who always made a thorough analysis of it and commented on it in detail. In the fourth century B.C., a commentary on it was written by Katyayana, and in the second century B.C. Patanjali wrote a new Sanskrit grammar. Both of them were familiar not only with Sanskrit but also with local dialects.

During the reign of the Magadha and Mauryan kings Prakrit also became widespread: it was in this language that Ashoka's edicts were written and various other inscriptions compiled. There already existed several dialects. It is in one of these—Pali—that the Buddhist canon has come down to us. According to tradition it was written down on the island of Sri Lanka in the year 80 B.C. In his grammar Patanjali mentions works written in Prakrit. At that time there already existed poetic texts, known in Indian literature as *kavya*, and certain Sanskrit writings on politics and morals (the *Shastras*).

Material found in the writings of Panini and Patanjali give grounds for the assumption that there also existed dramatic works at this time. In Patanjali's grammar there are references to actors, the stage, musical instruments, etc.

### **Architecture and Sculpture**

Most of the buildings dating from the Magadha and Mauryan periods were made of wood, and for this reason only fragments of them have been preserved to the present day. Yet gradually stone

came to be used as well. Excavations at the site of ancient Pataliputra led to the discovery of parts of the royal palace and the hall of the Hundred Pillars. In addition to such secular buildings religious edifices of this period are also of major interest, in particular the Buddhist *stupas* at Sanchi and Bharhut dating from approximately the third and second centuries B.C.

During the Mauryan period local schools of sculpture grew up among which the most notable were the north-western one centred in Taxila and the eastern one with its centre in Tosali. A high degree of mastery is to be found in the capitals decorating the pillars on which Ashoka's edicts are inscribed. The culture of the Mauryan period, particularly that of the north-western regions, reflects a certain influence of Achaemenid culture, but in general ancient Indian culture of that period was profoundly national and original, a culture that had grown up on a foundation of local tradition.

### Political Ideas

The second half of the first millennium B.C. was an extremely important stage in the development of political organisation and statehood in ancient India. This period is linked with the formation of the first large states in the Ganges valley, and later of the united empire. Principles of administration and theories of state power were being elaborated; political schools and political treatises started to appear. Of particular interest is the treatise *Arthashastra*, traditionally held to be the work of Kautilya, the chief dignitary in the service of the Mauryan king, Chandragupta. For the most part this political work appears to have been compiled in the early years of our era, but the ideas and principles of state policy expounded in it reflect the spirit of the Mauryan age.

During the Magadha and Mauryan times there existed republican states alongside the monarchies, although the monarchy was the most widespread form of state power at the time. The ancient Indians themselves held that the state had not always existed but had come into being (thanks to the gods' help) in order that law and order might reign among men, since the stronger among them, like so many fish, had started to devour the small fry. Kautilya, author of the *Arthashastra*, believed that a most important task of the state was to uphold the social division, the hierarchy based on the four *varnas*. The king had to defend his subjects, and therefore it was his function to administer punishment. Indeed, the very science of state administration was known as the science of punishment. Kautilya cites the idea propounded by ancient authorities to the effect that punishment is the best means through which to govern men.

The politicians of those days considered that the most dangerous form of unrest was internal unrest and Kautilya declared directly,

addressing the king, that internal unrest is more terrible than unrest from without, since it gives rise to a general spirit of mistrust even at court and among the king's retinue. Special attention was focussed on the secret service and application of secret tactics in politics. Kautilya advised the king to offer his officials bribes, send spies to them, sow discord among the officials of state and use not just open but also secret punishments both for his supporters as well as his enemies.

It was practical interests that Kautilya put before all else. Starting out from this principle he even tolerated deviations from the established norms laid down in the *Shastras*. As he saw it, if a law contradicted governmental instructions, then preference should be given to the latter.

Kautilya advised the king, when he found himself in a difficult financial position, to confiscate property from the temples and thus replenish his treasury. Kautilya even elaborated certain methods which could be used by the king to turn his people's superstition to his own advantage and to convince them that their ruler possessed magical powers.

In this period various methods were elaborated for establishing relations between states, for conducting war and peace negotiations. One of the most important issues was that of foreign policy. The *Arthashastra* expounds six principal methods of foreign policy: peace, war, watching and waiting, offensive, searching for means of defence and double-faced policy. Special attention is paid to the activity of ambassadors, whose range of duties was extremely wide. Apart from observance of treaties and maintenance of the prestige of his state Kautilya considered an ambassador obliged to provoke disputes between allies, instigate secret intrigue, effect surreptitious transfer of troops, i.e., use all possible means of action available. Methods for waging strife against neighbouring states were also elaborated in detail, for such states were usually regarded as enemies. The neighbour of a neighbour would be seen as friend, but the neighbour of that friend as another enemy. When writing about the most advantageous situation for an attack Kautilya advised that account be taken of the financial position of the potential enemy and the ruler's relations with his subjects. His principle was that if subjects were stirring against their ruler, then they might bring about his downfall, even if he appeared powerful. For this reason it was important to come out against precisely that ruler whose subjects were hostile to him.

Major achievements in the political theory of ancient India were a direct result of advance in scientific knowledge and overall progress in the development of society.

It is revealing to note that Kautilya held the four major fields of knowledge to be philosophy (*anvikshiki*), "the teaching on the *Vedas*", the teaching on the economy, and the teaching on state administration (*dandaniti*). Nor is it any mere accident that he placed

philosophy first among the major sciences. Kautilya mentioned three philosophical systems—Lokayata, Sankhya, Yoga. Knowledge of philosophy, according to Kautilya, ensured success in the running of state affairs.

The wide range of ideas investigated and the depth of their analysis place the political science of ancient India on a par with that of ancient Greece, and Kautilya on a par with one of the greatest thinkers of antiquity, Aristotle.

#### RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS OF THE MAURYAN PERIOD

The middle of the first millennium B.C. was a time of searching and reform in matters of religion and philosophy in ancient India. Vedism as a religion had, to a certain extent, lost its influence. The primitive character of its mythological concepts, its intricate and archaic ritual, the crude material claims of the priests, whom many had ceased to regard as the bearers of any superior wisdom, were all out of step with the spirit of the new age and gave rise to protest. The first attempt to surmount this crisis was a movement which found reflection in the *Upanishads*. This movement as a whole, however, did not reject Vedism, but strove to inject it with new life on a new, theoretically sounder basis. Upholders of orthodox traditions waged a hard struggle against all other trends and systems that had embodied new principles consistently and with firm resolve. Tradition called the latter unorthodox (i.e., rejecting the authority of the *Vedas*) and included among them two new religions that had emerged by this time, namely Jainism and Buddhism, and also all those schools of thought which gave expression to the materialist trend in Indian philosophy. All these teachings came out openly against the immutable significance of the Vedic texts.

Between the early *Upanishads* and the appearance of new religious and philosophical systems, essentially independent of Brahmanism, there was a period marked by intensive spiritual searching. A large number of ascetics, who had broken their ties with ordinary everyday life and old traditions, emerged as the harbingers of these new ideas. They were known as *parivrajakas* (literally, wanderers or pilgrims) and *shramanas*. (Later the term *shramana* came to denote ascetics adhering to unorthodox movements or sects.) Initially these *shramanas* did not set up their own communes and schools, but later faithful followers started to gather round the more celebrated of the "wanderers".

At this period of intellectual ferment a large number of new teachings and trends emerged, many ideas of which were later taken up and elaborated by the founders of the main reform doctrines. All the early *shramana* schools refused to accept the authority of the *Vedas* and the ideological and social norms based on the latter. This,

naturally, led to categorical rejection of the claims of the Brahmins to the role of unique bearers of the "supreme truth", an understanding of which was considered to be beyond the reach of the ordinary mortal. The ideological privileges of the Brahmins also served to justify their role as the highest *varna* in Vedic society; it was quite natural therefore that the *shramanas*, who in the vast majority of cases were representatives of the other *varnas*, rejected the social claims of the priesthood with great consistency.

Another essential feature of all the doctrines put forward by the *shramanas* was the profoundness of their approach to ethical problems. Rejecting the traditional social order based on the *varna*, which had been proclaimed and elaborated in Vedic literature, they had to approach in a new way the question as to man's place in Nature and in society. Theoretical activity in this direction varied in intensity from one reform school to another. However there is no doubt that the detailed elaboration of ethical problems by the Jainas and Buddhists was not merely a characteristic feature of those two movements; rather it served to express the searching for new standards of behaviour, which was characteristic of all unorthodox teachings in that period.

The social aspect of the *shramana* ascetic schools constituted a significant phenomenon of Indian history. The *shramana* teachers themselves did not proclaim any particular social programme, however many of their ideas and in particular their irreconcilable opposition to a "Brahmin India" made them potential allies of the rulers of early Indian states in their struggle against tribal disunity, which was sanctified by Brahmin teaching. The process of centralisation in Indian political life coincided with the emergence of unifying tendencies within spiritual life and this was no accident, for a large number of separate, independent teachers were giving way to a small number of religious schools enjoying recognition throughout India.

Some of the religious schools were not significant for the whole country, yet they all exerted a considerable influence upon the development of ideas and conceptions that held sway in that and subsequent eras. Buddhist tradition lists the names of six "heretical" teachers with whom the Buddhists engaged in fierce dispute. Among these were the founders of two highly important religious and philosophical schools—Jainism and Ajivikism.

### **Jainism**

One of the earliest unorthodox religions in India was Jainism. The date of the birth of this religion and the name of its founder have been handed down to us by ancient tradition. Its founder was Vardhamana, a *kshatriya* from Videha (modern Bihar), who lived in the sixth

century B.C. At the age of twenty-eight he left his father's house and wandered off into the forest where he devoted himself to ascetic life and meditation (to the ancient Indians the link between mortification of the flesh and through this a shedding of ordinary human interests and weaknesses on the one hand, and the enhancement of man's capacity for mental concentration on the other, appeared self-evident). After twelve years' asceticism the principles of a new teaching had taken shape in his mind which he then proceeded to propagate in various parts of India, collecting as he did so large numbers of disciples. Vardhamana lived to over eighty: initially his teaching took root only in Bihar, where he had influential patrons, but later centres of his teaching grew up in the most remote regions of India. The founder of the new teaching came to be known as Mahavira (the Great Hero) or Jina (the Conqueror); these honorary titles were often bestowed on specially venerated religious teachers (indeed, the name of this teaching, Jainism, is a derivative of the second epithet, in other words the teaching of Jina). In addition to the adherents of the new religion who led a monastic life, many laymen soon swelled the ranks of Mahavira's followers. These lay members did not renounce property or family, but observed specific rituals laid down in Jaina teaching. Later Jainism was to become a significant factor not only in India's cultural life but in the country's social life as well.\*

The essence of the teaching proclaimed by Jina (and elaborated by his closest followers) is expounded in the early Jaina writings. The basis for man's comprehension of the world is presented as man's direct knowledge of things received via the senses (as is also the case in other teachings appearing at the time); indeed this particular kind of realism is intrinsic to the majority of teachings evolved in ancient times (and not only in India). Jaina teaching does not present the material and the spiritual as opposites: man's ability to feel and to think is as natural a manifestation of life as the processes at work in the natural world that surrounds man. At first glance this principle might be seen in part as a step in a materialist direction, but only in part, since Jainism consistently develops the two possibilities for logical interpretation inherent in it. It not only "materialises" the spiritual, but also "spiritualises" the material. The archaic concept of the soul is carried to its extreme conclusion in this teaching. The soul is present in all things; plants and even stones are seen to have a soul. Souls are eternal and were not created by the gods.

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\* According to the beliefs of the Jainas themselves (this was how the followers of Vardhamana—*Jina*—referred to themselves), their teaching can be traced back to the depths of time. They provide names of twenty-four teachers—so-called *tirthankaras* (ford-markers across the stream of existence) and Vardhamana is only last in this list. In reality however all the main principles of the new faith are linked with Vardhamana's name (or are traceable to a still later period). Stories of the *tirthankaras* constitute a mixture of myth, legend and reminiscences of certain earlier attempts at religious reform.—*Auth.*

In addition to data gleaned from immediate experience the Jainas accepted as equally valid categories stemming from the concepts propounded in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*: they believed, for instance, in reincarnation and in the law of *Karma* that determines the new embodiment of a being in accordance with his former deeds.

The acceptance by the Jainas of the fact that all phenomena of Nature are animate accords most happily with this view and all dividing lines between various species of creatures disappear: a human being can turn into a stone, while a stone might even attain the human state. The law of *Karma* determines the position of the soul which might appear at an animal, human, divine or infernal level.

Like most ancient Indian religious teachings, Jainism saw its fundamental aim not as the attainment of knowledge as such, but the elaboration of prescriptions and norms which might help man in the practical achievement of his religious ideal. As in the *Upanishads*, so too in Jainist teaching, it is envisaged in "ultimate liberation", that is, surmounting all passions and earthly ties and in a state where being dissolves into the impersonal, universal whole. When this state is attained by man, he emerges from subjugation to all natural laws of existence and shall never be reborn again. This "liberated" being is superior to all else in the world, he surpasses the gods, since they too are subject to the law of *Karma*. Men, and in particular *arhants* (i.e., those who have achieved full holiness), stand higher than the gods, because the gods cannot achieve the state of *arhantship*. In order to liberate himself a god needs to be reborn among men, in the world of men. The "path to liberation" lies via extraordinarily rigorous asceticism, abstinence and self-mortification.

The only serious schism in the history of Jainism was connected precisely with the practice of asceticism: the *Shvetambaras* or White-Clad sect was criticised by the more orthodox group that rejected clothes altogether. Adherents of the latter group were known as the *Digambaras* or Sky-Clad sect.

Only the soul of an ascetic could achieve "liberation", not that of a layman. It is no accident that asceticism was practised on a far wider scale by the Jainas than by the adherents of other religions of ancient India. Even the title of Mahavira—Jina or the Conqueror—was associated with victory over a series of reincarnations, over earthly feelings and possessed ascetic implications.

The essential feature and main principle of Jainist ethics is *ahimsa* (non-violence in relation to living creatures). The Jainist monk not only refrained from killing animals but also went to great lengths to avoid accidentally crushing even the tiniest of insects. Rules of behaviour for monks were later elaborated in great detail and recorded in Jainist texts. They were obliged to observe twenty-eight rules of conduct, which included truthfulness, restraint, a strict ban on theft, etc. These rules were less stringent and less numerous for the lay followers of Jainism.



Soon Jainism became widespread in the country, however it did not prove a viable rival of Buddhism or Hinduism. It went into an unmistakable decline in the first centuries A.D., although within a small enclosed community it has been preserved in India up until the present day. Yet the influence of Jainism on Indian culture of the ancient times and that of the Middle Ages was considerable. Jainism inspired an extensive literature, and the realism intrinsic in its philosophy gave rise to the Jainas' interest in various fields of science. The contribution of the Jainas to the domain of scientific achievement was very significant.

### **Early Buddhism: the Fundamentals of the Buddhist Doctrine**

Buddhism like other religious reform teachings was propagated most widely of all in Northern India, and in particular in Magadha, which was seen as the centre of unorthodox teachings, as a kingdom which had been most reluctant to accept Brahmanism. The unorthodox or so-called heretical schools of thought had many common features, despite the fact that there also existed considerable differences between them. Initially Buddhism did not exert any special influence and was merely one of the unorthodox schools of thought anxious to secure support from the powerful states of the sub-continent and in particular that of the rulers of Magadha.

This new teaching that rejected rigid caste barriers and supported equality of all men regardless of their origin was particularly attractive to the mercantile strata of society, the more prosperous among the *vaishyas*, whom Brahmanism granted only a most modest place in the social hierarchy. Buddhism also proved popular among the *kshatriyas*. At the time they were concentrating more and more power in their own hands, yet were aware of the strong ideological pressures to which they were subjected by the Brahmins, who proclaimed themselves the highest and only sanctified *varna* or even terrestrial gods.

Free representatives of all *varnas* were admitted to the Buddhist community or *sangha*, and this considerably widened the new teaching's sphere of influence. For those who did not join the *sangha* the hope of *svarga* was still open—the ideal which Buddha presented to the layman. In its early period the ethical aspect of Buddhism was pre-eminent; Buddha did not elucidate complex metaphysical questions in his teachings to laymen.

The success of Buddhism in its initial phase can be explained to a large degree by the fact that Buddha in his teachings did not call for a rejection of all old traditions and customs, which had taken firm root in both the social and intellectual life of an ancient and conservative society, but rather attempted to come forward with a new interpretation, give his own explanation for many of the established norms.

Buddhism was an essentially original teaching. The degree to which it differed from other Indian religious teachings was so great that on several occasions attempts were made to liken it to other religions that had emerged beyond the borders of India, for example with Christianity. However the total range of innovations involved was carefully included within the framework of general traditional concepts, which Buddhism had never totally rejected.

It is not for nothing that scholars trace a link between Buddhism and the *Upanishads*. This does not however imply that Buddha shared the principles inherent in the teaching of the *Upanishads*. It would be more correct to assume that the *Upanishads* themselves reflected certain new concepts that emerged as the society of ancient India and the culture of its various regions developed.

The similarities between Buddhism and Brahmanism can be put down to various factors, however it is most significant that after the appearance of Buddhism and other reform schools of thought the traditional religion of the Indians that had been handed down over centuries did not undergo any essential changes. Buddhism like Jainism took over the traditional Indian rituals that had been sanctified by Brahmanism. For this very reason the Vedic and Brahman gods were not anathematised.

Buddhism did not reject the traditional Indian divinities, but it allotted to them such an insignificant place within its own system, that after being absorbed into Buddhism they were eventually to disappear, as it were. This incorporation of Brahmanic divinities into Buddhism undoubtedly made it far more popular among the peoples in the various regions of the country, yet Buddhism itself through absorption of these beliefs risked being swallowed up by them. If we take the early development of Buddhist doctrine it can be seen that at that time veneration of the Vedic gods was not detrimental to the distinctive essence or independence of the new religion in the framework of which it was practised. The essential feature of Buddhism (as indeed of the ideology found in the *Upanishads*) was indifference to concrete forms of worship.

Buddhism, like the teaching in the *Upanishads*, recognises reincarnation and the doctrine of *Karma*. While rejecting the idea of the soul as an indestructible entity Buddhism categorically asserts that spiritual energy is indestructible. No manifestation of that energy can be reduced to nothing. It is merely a moment of that continuous process of transformation taken in isolation. This idea of the eternal nature of all that is spiritual gives rise to the doctrine of *Karma*. Since action does not disappear, sooner or later it will manifest itself in its inevitable consequences. Since it is a spiritual act by its very nature, it is not fettered by the life of the body: a new incarnation is thus predetermined by former deeds, or is at least subject to their all-important influence.

In a commentary on Buddhist teaching Academician Shcherbatskoy wrote: "Being ... is a continuous process of minute-by-minute birth and disappearance. This process is subject to the law of causality.... Not only is there nothing eternal, but there is no lasting being at all; hence there are no substances either spiritual or material."\*

Buddha regarded everything in the world as being in a state of constant change. The *dharmas* (particles man cannot cognize), which as a result of various combinations constitute material and spiritual elements, are in constant movement, are an endless pattern of combinations.

The corner-stone of Buddhism is of course the teaching concerning the Four Noble Truths, which according to tradition were expounded by Buddha in his first sermon. In his exposition of these "truths" Buddha defines the nature of human existence, the causes of human suffering and charts out the path to salvation. When viewed as a whole it is clear that the essence of this central sermon of Buddha was subordinated to this idea of the path of salvation. Buddha is traditionally purported to have stated that just as the water of the oceans has a salt taste, so his teaching has no more than a "taste of salvation". Buddha represented life in terms of suffering, which results from desires and striving after earthly existence and its pleasures. This is what led him to urge men to renounce desires and to point out to them the path of salvation. This involved turning one's back on the law of *Karma* and wresting oneself out of the circle of reincarnations, into which man falls as a result of his not knowing the truth. He who enters a *sangha* can attain *nirvana*, if he sets himself free from the fetters of earthly life, of all forms of suffering and passions, subdues his ego and surmounts the dualism of body and spirit.

In the state of *nirvana*, according to the Buddhist teaching, the constantly changing *dharmas* cease to move, and hence so does the flow of new combinations. There ensues a complete break with the *samsara*—the transition from one bodily form to another, a break with the world of substances. *Nirvana*, the attainment of which was linked with the disappearance of the chain of subsequent reincarnations, was seen as the supreme goal, towards which the faithful aspired. The ideal model was the *arhant*—the holy man who had attained the state of *nirvana* through his deeds and his striving after spiritual perfection.

It is no accident that the ethical aspect of Buddhism was accorded such enormous importance. The moral side of man's behaviour was bound to occupy a special place. The Buddha called upon men to follow the Eightfold Path: right views, right conduct, right effort, right speech, right meditation, etc. It was these principles that

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\* F. I. Shcherbatskoy, *The Theory of Knowledge and Logic as Presented in the Teachings of the Later Buddhists*, St Petersburg, 1909, Part II, pp. 117-18 (in Russian).

determined the essence of Buddhist morality. Man, in his rightful pursuance of this rightful path should, according to Buddha's teaching, rely on himself and not search protection, help and salvation from outside. It is on his own that man perpetrates evil, it is on his own that man degrades himself, we are told in the *Dhammapada*. It is on his own that he does not perpetrate evil as well, and it is on his own that he purifies himself. One man cannot purify another.

The Buddhists did not regard as essential the existence of God the Creator, who brings forth everything in the world, including man, God on whom man's destiny depends. Buddha is reputed to have said that for men who believe in a god such as that there exist no desires, no effort, no need to do anything, or abstain from doing it. According to Brahmanism on the other hand, man's life and his destiny are determined completely by the will of the gods, who shape man's intentions and destinies.

Despite the fact that Buddhism put forward ideas relating to the universal equality of men at birth, and to the specific nature of the *sangha*, Buddhism was not in any way a radical social movement. The cause of all worldly burdens, earthly suffering, and social injustice was presented in Buddhist sermons as the result of man's own "blindness" and explained in terms of man's incapacity to renounce worldly desires. According to the Buddhist teaching surmounting earthly suffering needed to be done not by means of struggle, but on the contrary through extinguishing all reactions to the world, through annihilation of man's awareness of his ego.

The word *Buddha* means "the Enlightened One" or "He who has perceived the truth". It was thus, in accordance with tradition, that Siddhartha Gautama came to be called after he "attained enlightenment" while sitting under a tree near the town of Gaya. Siddhartha was the son of the chief of the powerful Shakya tribe, but having renounced his wealth and the joys of a worldly life he became a hermit. Early Buddhist texts that have been preserved contain many references to the life of the founder of the Buddhist teaching. Of particular interest are the epigraphic materials dating from the fourth and third centuries B.C., which not only refer to Buddha but also specify his birthplace (Lumbini), a detail which coincides with the data provided in the religious texts.

Fierce controversy rages among contemporary scholars as to the historical authenticity of Buddha: attempts are being made to restore the original teaching propagated by Buddha himself. These questions are exceedingly complex, especially if we take into account that the canonical texts at the disposal of the present-day scholar date from approximately the third century B.C. (they are traditionally held to have been written down in Sri Lanka in the year 80 B.C.), i.e., several hundred years after the death of the founder of the doctrine. At the present time the most commonly accepted date for his death is 483 B.C. (and that for his birth 563 B.C.).

## The Teaching of the Ajivikas

In the early days the Buddhists' main rivals were the Ajivikas. The considerable popularity enjoyed by Ajivikism between the fifth and third centuries B.C. can be explained above all by its consistent and radical criticism of Brahmanism, propagated by Gosala, the founder of Ajivikism. Dissatisfaction with the social order defended by the Brahmans enhanced the prestige of reform teachings in the widest social strata. Criticism of the caste structure and the Brahmans' interpretation of the *Karma* doctrine, propounded by Gosala, attracted not only the lower strata of society but also those with newly acquired wealth, men of humble origin, sons of artisans or traders. Right from the outset Gosala did not restrict his teaching to the narrow horizons of any monastic group, but rather turned to the world of laymen. The outward simplicity of his doctrine (the reduction of all categories in the last analysis to all-embracing predetermination—*niyati*—and to the fatalism which stems from such predetermination) also added to its popularity in large sections of the population which had continued (even after they adopted the Ajivikas' beliefs) adhering in their everyday lives to familiar rituals and accepting many traditional views of the world, etc. In its early stages (the fifth century B.C.) the Ajivikas appeared to have had more followers than the Buddhists. This was probably linked with their undisguised emphasis on social reform. It is quite natural, as tradition asserts, that not only representatives of rich trading circles and artisans should have numbered among the followers of Ajivikism, but that it should also have been popular with the lower strata, particularly the potters. This would appear to link up with the statement in the *Vayu Purana* (a writing that was finally compiled some time between the third and sixth centuries A.D. but which refers back to an earlier tradition) that the followers of the Ajivikas were *shudras*, men of different castes, or even untouchables. Buddhists and Ajivikas actively competed with each other in winning new followers. It is therefore not surprising that the Buddhist *sutras* criticised Gosala and his teaching in exceptionally harsh terms. Theoretical disputes sometimes degenerated into open clashes. The well-known Buddhist author Buddhaghosha relates the story of a rich money-lender by the name of Migara—an inhabitant of Shravasti, the capital of Koshala—who for a long time was a patron of the Ajivikas and bestowed rich offerings on their community. However when Migara decided to adopt Buddhism the Ajivikas, who had been favoured by him, literally laid siege to his house, fearing evidently not so much the loss of one of their fellow-believers, but rather the loss of material support which he had been rendering them with unflinching regularity.

In the *Pali Canon* Gosala is compared with a fisherman, who, by laying his net at the mouth of a river, causes the demise of a multitude

of fish (i.e., leads off many of those who might otherwise have swelled the ranks of the Buddhist camp), and this is a clear pointer not only to the rivalry between two religious doctrines, but also to the considerable popularity of the Ajivikas at the time.

While in the fifth century B.C. the Ajivikas enjoyed considerable influence, more than the Buddhists or the Jainas, later this rivalry was to end in a victory of the Buddhists. One of the reasons for this appeared to be a certain one-sidedness of the Ajivikas' teaching. Though the Ajivikas rejected the traditional Brahman set of views they did not come forward with any positive answer to the main questions of concern to the people of that age to counter the Brahman ideas, as did Buddhism. Man's purpose, his place in the world and in society, the value of individual effort and the principles on which "correct conduct" should be based were not really discussed in Gosala's teaching, although they had proved of so much interest to the Buddhists and Jainas. The "universal predetermination" proclaimed by this teaching excluded in principle any consideration of all these questions.

### **Religio-Philosophical Currents and the Records of Megasthenes**

Important material on religious life in the Magadha and Mauryan kingdoms is provided by the Seleucid ambassador Megasthenes. Megasthenes and the classical writers that came after him drew apt distinctions between orthodox and unorthodox trends, dividing the ancient Indian "philosophers" into Brahmins and *shramanas*.

Close parallels with Indian writings are to be found in Strabo's account of the *shramanas*. Like Megasthenes he stresses their links with kings who turned to them in order to clarify the reasons behind events that were taking place (this ties in with Indian accounts).

Strabo tells of a special group of *shramanas* well known as soothsayers and conjurers, who wandered about from village to village, from town to town, begging as they went (these details can be seen to refer to wandering ascetics among the Ajivikas, who were most popular soothsayers).

Another account of Strabo's that appears to be linked with the *shramanas* is his description of the *pramnai* (most likely another version of the name *shramanas*). Strabo writes that the *pramnai* were represented as quite different from the Brahmins, as a special type of philosophers with a propensity for disputation and refutation. These philosophers used to mock the Brahmins, who were engaged in their study of the phenomena of Nature and astronomy, as haughty and unreasonable beings. These words convey with remarkable precision the atmosphere that reigned at the time when reform or so-called *shramana* schools were appearing on the scene, critical of the

Brahmans and their doctrine and engaged in diverse disputes on many problems concerning the existence of the world and man. *Shramanas* or "heretics" did indeed set themselves apart from the Brahmans, subjecting them to ridicule and disputing their theory concerning the exclusiveness of the Brahmans.

The *shramanas* attacked the haughty behaviour of the Brahmans, their allegedly unique right to instruct the whole of society and guide all men to the path of truth. Buddhist texts often refer to these claims of the Brahmans as ill-founded, misleading, false.

In the works of the classical writers there is a statement, most likely stemming from Megasthenes, to the effect that among the *shramanas* there existed groups of ascetics who rejected clothing (this information may well point to a link with the Jainas of the Digambara sect who walked about naked).

Megasthenes aptly picked out certain features of ideological development in India of this period: the existence of two basic trends—the orthodox trend and the reform (*shramana*) teaching opposed to the former, which however itself incorporated a variety of sects. Evidently, at the time when the Seleucid ambassador was living in India Brahmanism still enjoyed considerable influence, while the *shramana* sects, who opposed it, had not yet come to be regarded as something to be taken seriously; indeed not one of the reform trends had as yet come to be viewed as something serious or influential and thus merit particular attention on the part of foreigners. It should, of course, also be remembered that the fragments of Megasthenes' writings which have come down to us provide a far from comprehensive account; he may well have overlooked many important things about the religious life in India of the early Mauryan period.

## INDIA IN THE KUSHANA AND GUPTA PERIODS

### NORTH-WESTERN INDIA IN THE FIRST CENTURY B.C. AND THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

Already in the later years of the Mauryan empire many regions of North-Western India had become virtually independent of the central administration. Later, in a number of these north-western territories power was seized by minor Indo-Greek kings, of whose rule there are only fragmentary records available.

Among the numerous Indo-Greek rulers, one figure stood out in particular, that of Menander, who went down in Indian tradition by the name of Milinda. In the Buddhist text *Milinda-panho* (second century A.D.) reference is made to a disputation between King Milinda and the Buddhist philosopher, monk Nagasena. Some coins from Menander's kingdom have the *chakra* (or wheel)—the Buddhist symbol of power, which presumably means that the king either adopted Buddhist teaching or patronised its adherents. The capital of the state in question was Sagala (modern Sialkot). Menander's kingdom incorporated Gandhara, Arachosia and some parts of the Punjab. As mentioned earlier, the Greek army, by all appearances during the reign of Menander, advanced into Eastern India as far as the approaches to Pataliputra—the capital of the Shunga dynasty then in power.

In the first century B.C. the Iranian tribes of the Shakas (the Sai tribes in Chinese sources) made their way into North-Western India from Central Asia. Initially the Shakas, after encountering the Indo-Greek dynasties, came under the latter's domination, but later they set up their own Indo-Shaka states. One of the most famous Indo-Shaka rulers was King Maues who appears to have ruled in the mid-first century B.C. He established himself in Gandhara and his rule extended over the Swat valley and possibly part of Kashmir. Azes, his heir, extended his domains still further and bestowed upon himself the title of the "Great King of Kings". This state incorporated parts of Arachosia. In the first century A.D. Indo-Parthian dynasties appear on the scene and they were to wage a fierce struggle for supremacy against the Indo-Greek and Indo-Shaka rulers. The Indo-Parthian king Gondophares succeeded in asserting his power over Gandhara, Arachosia and part of Drangiana often known as Shakastan, i.e., the land of the Shakas (modern Seistan).



## **The Formation of the Kushana Empire**

Under the Kushana dynasty small and fragmented state formations torn by bitter rivalry were replaced by a great empire which incorporated not only regions of Northern and North-Western India, but also of Central Asia, and of what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Initially the Kushana kingdom incorporated parts of Bactria within Central Asia. Judging by Chinese sources, it was Yueh-chi tribes that invaded Bactria from the East in the second century B.C. and set up five domains. Later the Kushanas referred to as a Kuei-shuang in the Chinese chronicles came to dominate the others. Classical writers also refer to tribes that came in from the East and conquered Bactria.

Strabo mentions that these tribes won Bactria from the Greeks. At the time of the Kushana tribes' invasion Bactria was a highly advanced country with firmly established traditions of statehood and a well-developed culture. The people of this territory spoke the Bactrian tongue (which belonged to the Iranian group of languages) and they had a writing as well, derived from Greek. The Kushanas adopted these traditions of the Bactrians who led a settled life, although the traditions of the nomadic tribes continued to make a significant contribution to the shaping of Kushana culture. The question as to the origins of the Kushanas remains most obscure and is still fiercely debated in academic circles.

In recent years a variety of hypotheses have been put forward, for example, the Yueh-chi have been linked with the Tokharis—tribes from Inner Asia, who had conquered the Bactrians but had lost their language. Alternatively it has been suggested that the Kushana people emerged in Bactria (this suggestion would call into question the link between the Kushanas and the Yueh-chi). One of the Kushana kings at the end of the first century B.C., Heraus, referred to himself, judging by the coins of that period, as Kushan Heraus.

Under the Kushana ruler Kujula Kadphises (referred to in Chinese chronicles as Ch'iu-chiu-chuch) the Kushana state came to include Arachosia, part of Kashmir and some regions of Parthia. A large number of coins from Kadphises' reign have been found around Kabul, which indicates that this area was also part of the Kushana empire. Initially Kadphises had to acknowledge the authority of the Indo-Greek kings: some of the coins of his reign bear the portrait of the Indo-Greek king, Hermaeus, on one side, while on the other the name of Kadphises is written in Kharoshthi script. Later he was able to attain full independence, and the coins of his realm were minted bearing only the name of Kadphises, "King of Kings". During the reign of his son, Kadphises II or Vima Kadphises, the Kushana state already incorporated parts of the lower reaches of the Indus. The Kushanas were also able to push further east. It is possible that by this time they were ruling over parts of Eastern India even as far as Varanasi.

Vima Kadphises introduced an important fiscal reform, namely, the use of gold coins equal in value to the Roman aurei, which circulated within the confines of the Kushana state. This step can probably be regarded as the result of Roman influence. The seizure of strictly Indian territories had made it necessary for the Kushana rulers to take into account local traditions which dominated in the state administration throughout the empire. This explains why some of the coins minted during the reign of Vima Kadphises bear the god Shiva (sometimes with the sacred bull Nandin, one of the main figures associated with Shiva).

### **Kanishka**

The Kushana empire reached the height of its power during the reign of Kanishka, one of the most famous of all rulers of ancient India. Apart from coins and a small amount of epigraphic evidence there are few dated or contemporary sources of information relating to Kanishka's reign, although there are references to him and his activities in many of the late-Buddhist legends and tales. It was under Kanishka that the power of the Kushanas was extended as far as parts of Bihar and into Central India as far as the river Narbada.

During Kanishka's reign the Kushanas asserted their power in Saurashtra and Kathiawar, although the Western Kshatrapas (rulers of the provinces of Western India) were not completely under the power of the Kushanas. Chinese chronicles tell of the Kushanas' war against China over parts of Eastern Turkestan. Some sources imply that the Kushana troops even succeeded in penetrating far into these territories, although it is not known how long the Kushana kings were in power there. One thing is clear though, that under King Kanishka the Kushana Empire became one of the strongest powers of the ancient world, on a par with China, Rome and Parthia. At that time ties with Rome were close: it is possible that the reference in classical writings to the effect that there was an Indian embassy in Rome during the reign of Emperor Trajan (in the year 99 A.D.) applies to the Kushanas.

Chinese and Indian sources present Kanishka as a true adherent of Buddhism and it is with his name that the convocation of the Buddhist Council in Kashmir is linked (the so-called Fourth Buddhist Council). It is possible that Kanishka did indeed support Buddhism, but his actual policy was one of religious tolerance. This is borne out by the coins of his reign on which are depicted Indian, Hellenistic and Zoroastrian divinities. Under Kanishka Buddhism did not become a state religion, and a representation of Buddha is to be found only a few times on the numerous coins minted during Kanishka's reign.

During this time the Bactrian language became increasingly important and eventually was adopted throughout the state; the Bactrian script was also developed (on the basis of the Greek script). It came to oust the Kharoshthi script on coins too. A few years ago a large inscription in Bactrian, dating from the reign of Kanishka, was found in Surkh-Kotal, in Northern Afghanistan. In the inscription reference is made to the erection of a sanctuary, possibly the Kushanas' dynastic acropolis.

One of the most complex questions connected with this empire is that of chronology, including the specification of the dates for Kanishka's reign. Scholars have named different dates: 78, 103, 110, 144, 248, and even 278 A.D., in other words these hypothetical dates range over a period of two centuries. At the present time the most convincing of the attempts to date the "Kanishka era" places it in the first quarter of the second century A.D.

### **Kanishka's Heirs and the Fall of the Kushana Empire**

The most famous of Kanishka's successors were Huvishka and Vasudeva. During their reigns the Kushanas paid particular attention to the Indian territories in the Ganges valley. It became more and more difficult for them to assert their power over the North-Western provinces. By this stage intensive Indianisation of the Kushanas was in progress, they were imbibing Indian traditions and engaging in very close contacts with the local population. King Vasudeva was an adherent of the Shiva cult. A large number of Vasudeva inscriptions have been found in the neighbourhood of Mathura which by this time had begun to play a special role in the political and cultural life of the empire.

Already during Vasudeva's reign signs of the empire's incipient decline were to be observed. His successors had to wage a fierce struggle against both the strong kingdom of the Sassanians and local dynasties which had asserted themselves in various parts of India. The Kushanas found themselves obliged to recognise as independent the Nagas, the ruling dynasty in Mathura, and the Kaushambi kings. They also had to relinquish those parts of Central India which had once been incorporated in their empire. The fiercest struggle of all was that against the Sassanians of Iran in the middle of the third century A.D., after which the Western regions of the Kushana empire were made part of the Sassanian realm under Shapur I (241-272 A.D.). In a famous inscription of Shapur I (dating from 262 A.D.) that has been preserved in three versions—middle-Persian, Parthian and Greek—this particular ruler is referred to as "King of Kings of Iran and non-Iran" who ruled over the lands of the Kushanas stretching as far as Purushapura (Peshawar) right up to the borders of Kash (Kashgar), Sogdiana and Shash (Tashkent). However, at that period

the Sassanian ruler of the Kushana territories had not as yet, it seems, been appointed; it was somewhat later in the last quarter of the fourth century that special Kushana-Sassanian coins came to be minted and put into circulation by the Sassanian governors in the Kushana subject territories.

By the end of the Kushana era the only territories under their rule were those of Gandhara. Later almost all the Indian possessions of the Kushanas were incorporated into the Gupta empire.

### **The Kushana Pantheon and Cultural Advance**

The Kushana period was to leave its imprint on the historical and cultural development of many parts of the ancient world. Diverse peoples had been brought together within the confines of a single empire, common traditions had grown up within that framework and close ties had developed not only between different parts of the Kushana realm but also with Rome, the countries of South-East Asia and the Far East. Kushana culture attained maturity on a basis of the synthesis of diverse traditions, although certain of the local schools and trends were preserved. The finest of classical traditions were also adopted as part of the common heritage.

Recent excavations by Soviet archeologists in Central Asia have brought to light important material concerning the development in that area of local schools of architecture and sculpture. A prominent role in Kushana art was that played by the Bactrian school that was to exert an influence on Kushana art as a whole.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of the population of the Kushana empire is reflected in the Kushana pantheon, well known thanks to the coins from this era. Particularly good examples are found on the coins from the reigns of Kanishka and Huvishka, on which three groups of gods are prominent—Iranian, Hellenistic and Indian. Among the Iranian divinities represented are the god Mitra, the goddess of fertility Ardokhsho, the Moon-god (Mao), the god of war, Verethragna, and the supreme god, Ahuramazda. The Hellenistic deities represented were Hephaestus, Selene, Helios, Heracles. The most popular of the Indian gods were Shiva, Mahasena and Skandakumara.

This combination of gods reflected the formation of cultural traditions common to the whole of the Kushana empire and at the same time the policy of religious tolerance pursued by the kings concerned. Even after the fall of the empire many of these common traditions and links between parts of the former empire endured. The legacy of the Kushana era left an indelible mark on the subsequent development of many peoples of the East.

## The Formation of the Gupta Empire

After the fall of the Kushana empire there followed a long period of political fragmentation which lasted until the beginning of the fourth century A.D. After that a powerful new empire, that of the Guptas, began to take shape.

Up until then rulers of the Kushana dynasty had retained their hold over their small possessions in the Western Punjab; in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Malva, Kshatrapas were in control, there were a number of small state formations in the Ganges valley, including some republican ones. Magadha had seen a chain of dynasties but it continued to play a significant part in the economic and cultural life of Northern India.

As in the Mauryan age, so once again at the beginning of the fourth century A.D., Magadha became the centre of a new political unit, providing the core of the powerful Gupta empire. Very little is known of the early rulers of the Gupta dynasty. The founder of the dynasty was Sri Gupta who bore the titles *raja* and *maharaja*, but, as can be gleaned from certain Gupta inscriptions, the history of the dynasty really starts with King Ghatotkacha, Gupta's son. Unfortunately, the original borders of the Gupta possessions are not known. A number of historians feel that these must have coincided with the borders of Magadha, while others include parts of present-day West Bengal as well. The vagueness of the solutions suggested for this question is the result of the lack of precise epigraphic data. One of the main written sources available is the writing of the Chinese pilgrim, I Tsing.

Consolidation of the Gupta empire began in the reign of Chandragupta I, who adopted a title still more magnificent—*Maharajadhiraja* (Great King of Kings). The famous Allahabad inscription made by his son Samudragupta states that the king was the son of a "daughter of the Lichchhavis", in other words, it informs us that Chandragupta's wife came from the Lichchhavis. Ever since the Magadha era the Lichchhavis had been one of the leading forces in the political life of ancient India. It would appear that this republican union retained its power in the reign of the early Gupta kings. The alliance with the Lichchhavis must have contributed towards the consolidation of Gupta power. References to the matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis are not only to be gleaned from Samudragupta's inscription. On the gold coins of Chandragupta's reign we find depicted side by side with the king his Lichchhavi wife. Chandragupta's marriage to Kumaradevi from the Lichchhavis probably brought with it territorial gains as well: both states could come together to form a united empire under the Gupta kings.

The beginning of Chandragupta's reign and likewise the Gupta era is held to date from 320 A.D. However certain scholars regard that year as the date of Samudragupta's accession to the throne.

## Samudragupta and the Consolidation of the Empire

More detailed information is available with regard to the reign of Samudragupta. The Allahabad inscription, composed by the court poet Harishena in praise of Samudragupta's spectacular victories, enlists the names of kings and countries defeated by the Gupta ruler. Samudragupta succeeded in conquering nine kings of Aryavarta (in the Ganges valley) and twelve kings from Dakshinapatha, a region of Southern India. The territories of the states in Aryavarta were annexed to the Gupta empire. In the inscription mention is also made of two kings of the Naga dynasty, rulers of Ahichchhatra. It is very difficult to locate with any precision the other conquered territories, and this question is the subject of controversy in academic circles. Samudragupta's military activities were concentrated in the territories adjacent to his empire, in particular those in the Ganges valley. In the inscription there is also a reference to the Gupta king's seizure of the "forest kingdoms" which would appear to have been tribal alliances in the valleys of the Narbada and the Mahanadi.

Samudragupta's southern campaign was equally successful. First of all he defeated the king of southern Koshala, Mahendra, and then the rulers of the region now known as Orissa in the vicinity of the river Godavari, the Pallava king Vishnugopa, whose seat of power was Kanchi. The other areas mentioned in the inscription have not yet been identified.

The southern territories do not appear to have been incorporated into the empire; however they were regarded as subject territories insofar as they had to pay tribute to the conqueror. Certain other republican unions in Western and North-Western India were also subject territories of the Gupta empire: the Yaudheyas, the Malavas, the Madras and the Arjunayanas.

Relations between Samudragupta and both the Western Kshatrapas and the later rulers of the Kushana dynasty still ruling over the Western Punjab and some parts of Afghanistan were delicate ones. In the Allahabad inscription there is a reference to the Guptas' sovereignty over the Kshatrapas and the Kushanas. It would seem that Samudragupta had established some control over these territories, although the Kshatrapas and the Kushana kings had not relinquished their independence at that stage.

A revealing clue in these matters is the total absence of Kshatrapa coins for the years 332-348 and 351-360 A.D., which would seem to indicate at least temporary subordination to the Guptas. Gupta coins were in circulation on the territory of the Western Kshatrapas at that time. Later Rudrasena III, ruler of the Western Kshatrapas, restored his state to its former power for a time, while Simhasena even assumed the title "Great Kshatrapa".

Samudragupta maintained close ties with Sri Lanka. Tradition has it that the Ceylonese king Meghavarna (352-379 A.D.) sent an embassy

to Samudragupta asking for permission to build a cloister in India for Ceylonese monks. Samudragupta granted secret permission, and near the holy tree, Bodhi Vriksha, a Buddhist monastery seems to have been built.

During Samudragupta's reign the Gupta empire became one of the largest in the East. Its influence spread and close ties were established with many other states. Not without reason did the court poet Harishena write his eulogy of the valour and might of his king, who, in the words of the inscription, subdued the world. This assessment made by the court poet of old had considerable influence on many modern scholars who tended to idealise Samudragupta and described him, as did Vincent A. Smith, as the "Indian Napoleon", an outstanding individual possessed of remarkable qualities.

### **Chandragupta Vikramaditya**

Judging by epigraphical data Samudragupta ruled until 380 A.D., and the throne then passed to his son Chandragupta II, who ruled up until 413 or 415 A.D. According to the play *Devichandraguptam* by Vishakhadatta (of which only fragments have been preserved), Chandragupta II came to power after a fierce struggle with his brother Ramagupta. As made clear in the play, Chandragupta owed his success in this struggle to his victory over the Western Kshatrapas. This is borne out by epigraphical and numismatic evidence. The inscriptions do not describe the various stages of the campaign against the Kshatrapas, but there is reference to a visit paid to Malwa by Chandragupta's ministers and military commanders. At the beginning of the fifth century, coins, issued by Chandragupta II, found their way to the territory of the Western Kshatrapas; they resembled, as it were, the coins of former Kshatrapa rulers. This would point to the seizure by the Guptas of the territories of the Western Kshatrapas and their annexation. Moreover during his western campaign Chandragupta II also conquered some other parts of Western India, including the seaboard region. This brought the Guptas important trade centres and extended their links with overseas countries including those in the West.

On the basis of an inscription made at the behest of King Chandra on the famous Iron Pillar in Delhi, some historians assume that Chandragupta II (whom they identify with Chandra) extended his empire even as far as Balkh, but this hypothesis has not as yet been adequately established. During the reign of Chandragupta II relations with the Vakatakas—a powerful dynasty in the Western Deccan and Central India—deteriorated considerably. In an effort to secure his empire's southern and western borders Chandragupta II concluded a matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas by giving his daughter in marriage to the king of the Vakatakas. The Naga state also seems to

have retained some degree of power and independence in that period, although Samudragupta, according to his inscription, had defeated the kings of that dynasty. Presumably Chandragupta II hoped to ease the struggle with the Western Kshatrapas counting on the support of the Vakatakas and the Nagas.

The coins of the period in question show that a fiscal reform was introduced under Chandragupta II. His predecessors had only made provision for the circulation of gold coins, while now silver and copper ones were introduced. On the reverse of the silver coins minted in Chandragupta II's reign the holy bird Garuda is depicted. Garuda is also shown on copper coins minted by that Gupta king, which clearly indicates that Chandragupta II was an adherent of Vaishnavism. This is also borne out by one of the epithets associated with the king—Paramabhadragata (most worthy follower of the god Bhagavata).

The figure of Chandragupta II is one of the most popular in Indian history; to him was bestowed the name Vikramaditya (Sun of Prowess). The works of many outstanding writers, poets and scholars are traditionally linked with his reign. In Indian academic writing today the reign of Chandragupta II is often called the golden age of the Guptas.

After Chandragupta II died his son Kumaragupta came to the throne; in his reign, which lasted from 415 to 455 A.D., no events of outstanding importance were recorded. He adhered to the cult of Shiva. The god Kartikeya (Shiva's son) astride a peacock was depicted on the gold coins of his reign. A peacock was also depicted on the silver coins of his reign in place of Garuda. The prevailing peace was disrupted soon after Kumaragupta's death, and his successor Skandagupta found himself obliged to wage a bitter struggle against the Huns and the Ephthalites, whose tribes invaded India.

### **The Huns and the Ephthalites and the Fall of the Gupta Empire**

This union of tribes that had formerly inhabited Inner and Central Asia became very powerful in the fifth century, when it loomed as a threatening rival of Sassanid Iran and the last rulers of the Kushana dynasty. The Ephthalites succeeded initially in conquering the petty kingdoms in the western territories of what had once been the powerful Kushana empire, and then they gained spectacular victories over the rulers of Sassanid Iran. Later they invaded North-Western India and captured Gandhara. At that time (approximately 457-460 A.D.) the first clash between the Guptas and the Huns and Ephthalites took place. In one of the Gupta inscriptions there is a reference to the victory of Skandagupta over the Huns. Although these successes were short-lived, their significance was considerable,



especially if we take into account the terrible extent of the destruction which the Ephthalite army left in its wake. The western detachments of the Huns were scoring victories over Roman troops and laying waste parts of Western Europe. This war caused the Guptas financial difficulties; they were obliged to reduce the gold content of the coins and cut down on the number of variations to be found in each of the coins circulated.

While Skandagupta's heirs were in power, strong drives for separatism took place and certain of the more distant provinces began to aspire towards independence of the central administration. During the reign of King Budhagupta, for instance, the governor of Kathiawar assumed the title *maharaja* (Great King), not a very elevated title at the time, instead of *senapati* (military commander), and actually became an independent ruler though officially he was still a vassal of the Guptas. The kings of Southern Kosala and the Narbada region were by this time dependent rulers only in name. Bengal gained independence. All these developments brought about a situation in which the empire was no longer united.

A powerful blow was dealt at the empire by the new invasions of the Huns and the Ephthalites. Under the Ephthalite king Toramana (490-515 A.D.) the Huns succeeded in penetrating deep into India, seizing Sind, parts of Rajasthan and Western India. Toramana's heir Mihirakula initially scored a number of victories over the Guptas; later the Gupta king Narasimhagupta (or Baladitya) nevertheless routed his army in a decisive battle and Mihirakula was obliged to withdraw once again into North-Western India, retaining as he did so only parts of Gandhara and certain areas of the Punjab (the capital of which was then the town of Sakala—modern Sialkot). In 533 A.D. Yashodharman, the ruler of Malwa, defeated the Huns and the Ephthalites, but by this time the unity of the Gupta empire was already in shreds. Making the most of the Gupta empire's weakened state, Yashodharman gained independence. Apart from Malwa other regions also became independent. In Kanauj, for example, the Maukhari dynasty was established.

For some time yet the Guptas were able to assert their power over Magadha and other territories, but now all that remained were weak descendants of once great kings. These rulers came to be known as the later Guptas. Such was the fall of one of the greatest empires of the ancient world.

#### THE WESTERN KSHATRAPAS AND THE SATAVAHANAS

In the Deccan and in Southern India in the first centuries A.D. major processes of class formation were at work and large states were taking shape. Communications between north and south were increasing, and also between the southern states and Rome, on the

one hand, and the countries of South-East Asia, on the other. At that period the Satavahana empire was still playing a leading role. After the state of Kalinga had fallen the main rivals of the Satavahanas were the Kshatrapas—descendants of those Shaka tribes who had settled in the lower reaches of the Indus and in Kathiawar as early as the first century B.C. Gradually certain of these tribes rose to prominence, namely the Kshaharatas and the Kardamakas who had grown particularly powerful in the first centuries A.D.

In the middle of the second century A.D. the Kshatrapas succeeded in capturing certain regions of the Western Deccan, which had previously belonged to the Satavahanas. Later under Nahapana the Kshatrapa domains were extended still further. Nahapana inscriptions found in Nasik and Karle indicate that these regions were part of his state. Epigraphic evidence also points to the fact that in the years 119-125 the Kshatrapas also controlled some areas of Southern Gujarat and the port of Bharukachchha (modern Broach). Long rivalry between the Kshatrapas and the Satavahanas ended in victory for the latter. Inscriptions refer to victories of the Satavahana king Gotamiputa Satakani over the Shakas. Evidently, he achieved ascendancy over parts of Western India.

In one of the inscriptions he is referred to as the destroyer of the Kshaharata line and the restorer of glory to the Satavahana dynasty. These inscriptions specified the borders of the Satavahana state during the reign of Gotamiputa Satakani: he captured parts of the North-Western Deccan and Western India from Nahapana. Furthermore he was in control of other neighbouring regions, Ashmaka and Vidarbha, and later annexed territories that had formerly belonged to the Satavahanas' old rival, Kalinga.

However the Satavahanas' victories were only short-lived. During the reign of the powerful Shaka Kshatrapa Rudradaman (in the year 150 A.D.) the Satavahanas were obliged to forego many of their newly acquired territories. In one of the inscriptions made at Rudradaman's behest he is referred to as the ruler of Avanti, Surashtra and Aparanta; in other words, extensive regions of Western India had fallen to the Shakas, while the Satavahanas only retained their hold over the Nasik and Poona areas, in the west.

Gotamiputa's descendants continued the struggle against the Kshatrapas. Under King Pulumavi (130-159 A.D.) the Satavahanas, after failing to score any spectacular successes in the western regions, concentrated their attention on the eastern regions. Sometimes, for example, during the reign of King Shri Yajna Shatakarni (whose inscriptions have been found in Nasik), they succeeded in annexing certain regions of Western India, however they were no longer in a position to uphold the unity of the empire. It was only in the eastern regions that the Satavahanas were able to maintain their influence.

## The State of the Vakatakas

After the fall of the Satavahanas various minor dynasties waged a bitter struggle for power. Eventually it was the Vakatakas who emerged as the most powerful. Their initial territorial nucleus was in the part of India now known as Berar. The beginning of this dynasty is given the approximate date of 255 A.D. The founder of the dynasty is held to be King Vindhyashakti who, according to information contained in the *Puranas*, waged war against the Shaka Kshatrapas and certain local dynasties in the Deccan, which had achieved their independence after the fall of the Satavahanas. Vindhyashakti's successor—Pravarasena I (275-335 A.D.)—was more successful in his foreign policy. He proudly assumed the title *samrat* (sole ruler). During his reign the Vakatakas ruled over extensive territories: regions between the Narbada and Krishna rivers were part of their domain. In his efforts to gain a foothold in Central India Pravarasena concluded a matrimonial union with the Naga dynasty: his son married Bhavanaga, daughter of a Naga king.

When the mighty Gupta state appeared in the political arena, the Vakatakas had to start thinking about the defence of their northern frontiers. Samudragupta's successful campaign in Southern India inevitably complicated Vakataka-Gupta relations.

In the famous Allahabad inscription referring to the Gupta king's military feats the states he conquered are listed; among the names of the conquered kings is that of King Rudradeva of Aryavarta. Many scholars equate Rudradeva with Rudrasena I (335-360), grandson of Pravarasena, who ruled the Vakatakas at that time. However the Guptas did not annex all those regions that had been seized during Samudragupta's southern campaign, although Gupta influence after that made itself much more powerfully felt. Both dynasties appreciated the importance of the establishment of friendly relations. The Guptas planned to bring pressure to bear on the southern parts through the medium of the Vakatakas, while the latter were not in a position to put up any strong resistance to the Guptas in open warfare. At that time the Guptas were concentrating their attention on the struggle against the Western Kshatrapas and were anxious to secure their southern frontiers. All this favoured friendly relations between the Guptas and the Vakatakas, while Rudrasena II, the heir to the Vakataka throne and grandson of King Rudrasena I, married Prabhavatigupta, daughter of the Gupta king Chandragupta II Vikramaditya.

Gupta influence made itself felt in particular at the Vakataka court when Prabhavatigupta became regent. At that time not only Gupta ambassadors but state officials as well made their way from Pataliputra to the Vakataka capital—Nandivardhana (near modern Nagpur). Soon afterwards a united dynasty was replaced by a number of local ones, the most influential of which was the Vakatakas from

Vatsagulma (Southern Berar). Yet these offshoots from the main line were not to remain in power for long and were soon obliged to recognise the sovereignty of the powerful Chalukya state.

### **The Pallavas and the States in the Extreme South**

Alongside the Vakatakas an important role in the political life of the Deccan was also played by the states of the Pallavas and the Ikshvakus after the fall of the Satavahanas; unfortunately, sources provide little information on these states. The Pallava capital was the town of Kanchipuram, and its northern border was formed by the river Krishna. The Pallavas clashed with the Guptas on more than one occasion. In Andhra at this time the Ikshvaku dynasty was in power and it had concluded an alliance with the Western Kshatrapas against the Pallavas, yet the Pallavas emerged victorious.

In the first centuries A.D. the large states of the Cheras, Pandyas and Cholas continued to exist in the extreme south of the country, states that had been mentioned as early as the inscriptions of the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka. These states had established direct links with Rome, which in its turn had set up trading stations in the south of India. Unfortunately almost nothing is known of the political history of these states, although in the first centuries A.D. some Tamil sources did appear. In the fourth-fifth centuries A.D. an outstanding work of Tamil literature, *Tiru Kural*, was written and this was followed by poems, grammatical treatises and other writings.

Available epigraphic material provides an overall picture of the system of administration in the states of the Deccan and Southern India in the first centuries A.D.

The Satavahanas and the Vakatakas set up a well-organised central administration. The empire was divided into provinces, and these in their turn consisted of districts. There was a large body of various officials, such as those in charge of provisions, chief scribes, military commanders, rural inspectors.

There are some references to the religious policies followed by the Satavahanas, the Vakatakas and other southern Indian dynasties. The Satavahanas protected the Buddhists. It is possible that the writings of the famous Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna are to be linked with the Satavahanas. The Chinese traveller Hsüan Tsang wrote that Nagarjuna even lived at the Satavahana court.

Along with Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism also became widespread. In Vakataka inscriptions reference is made to the fact that Rudrasena I was a Shaivite, while Rudrasena II was a Vaishnava. This syncretism of religions constituted one of the specific features of cultural development in the Deccan and Southern India in ancient times and the early medieval period.

### Agriculture

The Kushana and Gupta periods were marked by a further advance in agriculture. New plots of land were cleared, swamps were drained and agriculture gradually came to assume more and more importance. The state encouraged farmers to cultivate virgin and forest land. The *Milinda-panho* and the *Manava Dharmashastra* put forward the idea that those who clear forest land and prepare the plot of land for cultivation will be granted ownership.

Rice was grown in areas having an abundance of water. These were in particular Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Orissa and the coastal areas of Southern India. At that time many different kinds of rice were already known. In the *Amarakosha* various types of soil are listed that are suitable for rice cultivation, for wheat, barley and sesame. Amarasinha, the author of this dictionary, was acquainted with beans, lentils, not to mention cucumbers, betel, onion, garlic and pumpkin. Sugar cane was also cultivated on a wide scale.

The south was well known for pepper and spices. In classical sources the southern regions were even referred to as the land of pepper. Farmers were able to bring in two or three harvests every year; many cereals were even exported. In the *Periplus Maris Erythrae* (second century A.D.) there are references to the export of rice and wheat. In later treatises special emphasis is laid on the fact that those who cultivated and irrigated waste land were to be exempt from the payment of taxes until such time as they had made twice as much in profits as they had initially needed to invest. It is worth mentioning that in the inscriptions of the Gupta age there are frequent references to the purchase of waste land, which must, it appears, have been an advantageous undertaking at the time and also have been encouraged by the state.

At that time new crops appeared in India from overseas. Agricultural techniques also became more advanced. The plough was the main tool used by farmers. In the *Brihaspati smriti* mention is made of the ploughshare which had to be of a fixed weight, and in his dictionary Amarasinha includes a detailed description of the plough. Agricultural implements made of iron became widespread and new types of implements also began to appear. In Taxila among archeological finds relating to the first century A.D. were axes of a new, more sophisticated type. It is possible that this was the result of foreign influence, since similar ones were to be found commonly in countries that had come under the influence of Roman cultural traditions. Apart from the spade, other finds at Taxila included sickles and hoes of a new shape.

In Indian sources descriptions of farm work are to be found. A good

farmer was held to be he who worked the soil two or three times before sowing. After the harvest had been reaped the grain would be separated from the straw in special premises. Later the grain would be threshed in a special mortar, separated from the husks with a threshing basket and then it would be dried and stored in granaries.

In the period under discussion horticulture also made considerable strides: new sorts of vegetables and fruit appeared such as peaches and pears. Ancient Indians were familiar with mangoes, oranges, grapes and bananas. Coconut palms were common particularly in the coastal regions. To judge by inscriptions of the second century A.D., it was at this stage that coconut plantations were first set up. In the sources of the time advice is provided as to how to protect fruit trees and tend them with special oils and fertilisers. The *Shastras* contain detailed information with regard to the quality of soils, plant diseases, the distances which should be left between fruit trees, etc.

Irrigation also seems to have been developing rapidly. Rudradaman fortified the dam on Lake Sudarshana which had been built in the days of the Mauryan empire. Special reservoirs for water storage were built. In a second-century inscription there is reference to the construction of an enormous reservoir in a village not far from Ujjain. In an inscription at Hathigumpha the king of Kalinga, Kharavela, proudly announces the construction of canals and reservoirs in his land.

In many sources from the Gupta period stress is laid on the importance of agriculture; the playwright Kalidasa regarded land cultivation and stock-breeding as vital sources of wealth.

In addition to livestock farming, fishing and forestry also came into prominence. Special officials were appointed to inspect forests.

### **Landownership. The Extension of Private Holdings**

In the early centuries A.D. there was a further development of private landownership. In the *Shastras* considerable attention is paid to the rights of the landowner and their protection. Very high fines were laid down for illegal seizure of land belonging to others. In the course of many decades the owner of the land was able to retain his right to the land regardless of whether or not he actually tilled it himself or rented it out to temporary tenants. In the era of the Guptas special charters appear, which register the purchase and sale of land. In Gupta inscriptions we find many references to the sale of land, while in inscriptions dating from the Kshatrapa and Kushana periods such cases are registered extremely rarely.

The state endeavoured as before to maintain its control over the land resources, while the village communities attempted to hinder the extension of private landownership; however the gradual concentration of land in private hands continued unabated.

Interesting information is to be gleaned, for example, from inscriptions at Nasik relating to the Western Kshatrapas. In one of these there is reference to the fact that Ushavadata, the son-in-law of king Nahapana, was obliged first of all to purchase a plot of land from a private individual before presenting it to the Buddhist *sangha*. It is possible that this was already indicative of the new process at work linked with the development of private landownership at the expense of royal lands. Ushavadata would appear not to have any free land at his disposal and have been obliged to buy the plot from a private landowner.

In the first centuries A.D. the number of grants to private individuals increased and, most important of all, the nature of these grants started to change gradually. Earlier grants had only affected rights of land usage but had not related to any rights over peasants. While previously many grants had been temporary, i.e., had lasted for as long as official duties were carried out, they now ever more often assumed a hereditary character.

This entrenched the rights of private owners and made them fairly independent of the central administration. Some types of grants became permanent, and in the charters that recorded these donations it was specified that the land was made over for perpetuity, "for as long as the sun and moon and stars do shine".

At this period when the king was distributing plots of land for temporary tenure, he also gradually began to grant certain privileges to the owners, so-called immunity rights.

The next step was for these owners to acquire certain administrative functions over the land and those actually working it. They started to carry out certain legal functions; the king freed them from the previous obligation to admit royal functionaries to their lands. One of the earliest references to such rights is found in a Satavahana inscription of the second century A.D. (this procedure is an unmistakable pointer to the process of feudalisation, not only in the north but in the Deccan as well). The Satavahana king Gautamiputra Shatakarni donated land to the Buddhist monks and at the same time freed the village community from the presence of the king's troops on their lands as well as from the interference of state functionaries. This practice became particularly widespread after the fifth century A.D., when the kings started to delegate almost all fiscal, administrative and legal functions connected with privately owned land to the owners themselves. The rights over mines were also transferred, although these too had traditionally been regarded as a royal monopoly.

The transfer by the state of certain of its public functions to private individuals was laid down in special charters, the text of which was engraved on copper plates handed over to the new owners. This practice brought the status of temporary landowner still nearer to that of hereditary feudal lord and gave rise to a situation in which peasants gradually came under the domination of these landowners. Of course

this process was a gradual one and the state still retained many of its administrative functions in rural areas for quite some time.

Social relations were noted by the spread of tenant farming. Tenant farmers, often bereft of any means of production, became completely dependent on the owners of land.

In ancient Indian sources from this period an increasing number of references is to be found to the "donation of villages", which implies the transfer by the king of the right to collect taxes from these villages. The land would not be transferred at the same time, but the person to whom the peasants had to pay their taxes would no longer be the same. Gradually, the free members of the village community became dependent on private owners who sought to increase their land rights. These "donations" were not as yet feudal in character, but a definite trend towards feudal relations was already to be observed. These "donations" were made also to state officials, as in the preceding period, in place of salary.

### **Changes in the Status of the Direct Producers. Feudal Patterns**

Fundamental changes were to be observed in the status of the direct producers—the slaves, the free members of village communities and the hired labourers. In the later *Shastras* rules concerning slaves are laid down in detail, and they are classified in various groups. There is a marked move against turning temporary slaves into life-long ones, duties of slave-owners are laid down, neglect of which can even lead to fining of masters. Later *Shastras* place particular emphasis on the question of the *varna* to which the slave belonged. Sources dating from the Gupta period strictly underline the principle of *varna*. It was above all the rights of the Brahmans that were defended, and then those of the "twice-born". Katyayana goes as far as announcing outright that slavery does not apply to the Brahmans. According to Yajnavalkya a man of a lower *varna* might be made a slave, i.e., the fact that the *kshatriyas* or the *vaishyas* might be made slaves by the Brahmans was accepted.

In this period the question as to whether slaves should be freed or not was the subject of much controversy and it is no accident that the later *Shastras* devote a lot of attention to this matter. Conditions for the freeing of slaves, especially temporary slaves, were made considerably more lax. The *Narada smṛiti* describe in detail the ceremony carried out when slaves were set free: the master would break a vessel containing water, sprinkle his slave's head and declare him a free man. Slaves who had had their condition forced upon them as a result of poverty (as a means of obtaining food) had to be set free if they refused food. If a man became a slave as a result of debts, then repayment of his debts together with the interest due were sufficient to restore him his freedom.



Considerable changes also came about with regard to the position of free cultivators. While initially only land would be transferred from one owner to another, later land would change hands together with the men working it. In one of the earliest records of such transactions, a third-century Pallava inscription, it is stated that the share-croppers remain bound to the land after its transfer to the Brahmins. Gradually this practice was applied even with regard to men who had formerly been free cultivators and members of a village community, which meant that they were reduced to little more than serfs. In a fifth-century Vakataka decree a case is mentioned in which four farms set aside for local cultivators (or *karshakas*) are to be used as a gift, in other words those tilling the land are made over with the land to the new owner. By the middle of the first millennium A.D. feudal economic patterns had taken shape in India and these gradually developed, until a whole feudal society had become established. In the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. feudal relations were dominant within the multi-structural Indian society.

### Crafts and the Associations of Artisans

The level of craftsmanship in India rose considerably in the first centuries A.D. Indian metal-workers and foundrymen were famed for their skills. Even now it is still a mystery how in the fifth century they were able to make the Iron Pillar (more than seven metres high and weighing over six tons), which despite the damp climate has not suffered from corrosion or rust. In the *Milinda-panho* the working of gold, iron, lead and tin are singled out from other crafts. Those plying these crafts worked separately from each other. The king's metal-workers and armourers constituted a special group of artisans. State control over this section of the artisans was apparently particularly strict: the king was regarded as the owner of all minerals, and the right to extract metals was regarded as a royal prerogative. The production of arms was made subject to still closer supervision from the central administration.

A great variety of iron articles was being produced. Characteristic of the period is an appreciable Greco-Roman influence, on the one hand, and from Central Asia, on the other, with regard to production of weapons (for example, in Taxila and other north-western regions arms were produced according to Shaka models), but on the whole the metal-workers followed local traditions. Iron and steel articles were of a very high quality and exported on a wide scale. The *Periplus Maris Erythraeae* mentions the export of Indian iron and steel to African ports. In this work there is also reference to the export of copper. The metal-workers of the time were known for their artistry. The work of Indian jewellers was held in high regard far beyond the frontiers of India. In Taxila there appear to have been foreign jewellers and other craftsmen who were familiar with Hellenistic traditions, for many pieces of

jewellery discovered in the area bear a likeness to pieces from Egypt and Syria. In Eastern India, on the other hand, foreign influences were negligible.

The art of weaving was also making rapid strides, particularly with regard to the production of cotton fabric. Both cotton materials and silk were exported to the West where they were held in high esteem. In Indian writings dating from the first centuries A.D. there are references to various types of cotton materials dyed in different colours. Classical authors noted that Indian cotton was of a very light colour and purer in texture than that produced elsewhere. Fabrics from Benares were held in particularly high esteem and likewise the fine cottons from Bengal referred to in the *Periplus Maris Erythraee*. In the north-west woollen materials were also produced. There was considerable demand in the Hellenistic countries and in Rome for spices, perfumes and articles fashioned from ivory. Production of glass also developed apace; it was used to make eating utensils and articles of adornment.

In the Kushana and Gupta periods the guilds or *shrenis* became more sophisticated. These artisans' associations played an important role in Indian economic life, and the state endeavoured to place their activities under its control. However the *Shastras* demanded from the king that he respect the rules of the *shreni* and uphold their property rights. The independence of the *shreni* at that time was so considerable that, to judge by inscriptions of the time, they were able to draw up contracts with individuals and even enter into agreements with the central authorities. The *shreni* borrowed money from various individuals, who gave them commissions, that later had to be paid back with interest. Some of the *shreni* were extremely rich and were able to give to the Buddhist monks very costly gifts, even whole buildings. The *shrenis* had their own seals and symbols. Some of these seals, complete with inscriptions, have been found by archeologists during excavations of settlements dating back to the first centuries A.D.

### Trade

In the period in question internal and foreign trade expanded to a remarkable degree. Many formerly uninhabited regions had been settled, transport was better organised and trade routes had improved. The various parts of the country were now more closely linked. The economic specialisation of the various areas and zones made a permanent exchange of commodities essential. The circulation of money was also expanding very intensively at this period. Under the Guptas the state had devoted particular attention to the construction of roads and communications. Yet despite all this work the exchange between the various parts of the country was still of a very limited

nature. Roads were not always suitable for long journeys and traders encountered a good many problems.

Apart from the overland routes, rivers were now being made much fuller use of: this applied in particular to the Ganges and the Indus.

The state supervised the influx and selling of commodities. The sale of certain commodities was subject to strict control by the state and there was a royal monopoly on trade in certain items. In the *Manava Dharmashastra* it is written that the king could confiscate the whole of a merchant's property, if he was found exporting wares which came under royal monopoly. There was competition both between individual merchants and also between traders' associations.

In the towns there were special trade districts where the shops were concentrated. In the *Milinda-panho* there is a description of the flourishing city of Sagala (or Shakala)—the capital of the state of Menander, where there were special stalls for the sale of Benares fabrics, jewellery, perfumes, etc.

The Ganges valley was the principal trade area; from it there branched off trade routes leading to many parts of the country. The main trade centres in that area were Bharukachha (known by the Greeks as Barygaza) in the west, Patala (referred to as Patalene in Greek texts) in the Indus delta, Pushkalavati in the north-west and Tamralipti (modern Tamluk) in the east. In the *Periplus Maris Erythrae* there is mention of trade routes leading southwards from Pushkalavati. In Eastern India Varanasi, Kaushambi and Pataliputra were well known for their high-quality wares, and in the west, Ujjain.

The *Periplus Maris Erythrae* contains a reference to vessels sailing southwards down the coast of the Bay of Bengal, and the *Milinda-panho* speaks of shipowners visiting Sind, Bengal and the Coromandel coast. Woollen materials were brought from the north, precious stones and spices from the south, metals and silk from the east, and fabrics and horses from the west. Sind and Arachosia were famed for their horses.

The era of the Kushana and Gupta kings was marked by rapid development in the sphere of foreign trade. This was facilitated by close contacts maintained first by the Kushana kings and later the Gupta rulers with foreign lands. Trade involving sea routes also expanded. The ancient Indians were skilled navigators and appear to have been able to make use of the monsoons long before the Greek sea-captain Hippalus discovered them in the middle of the first century A.D. (some sources indicate that the Greeks too knew of the monsoons at an earlier date). The Indians traded with Arabia, the Mediterranean countries, and their vessels went as far as Africa. Such voyages were a continuation and extension of the contacts that had existed since times of old between India and the lands of the Mediterranean. A lively trade was also carried on with the countries of South-East Asia and Sri Lanka. Ships were depicted on Satavahana coins, which points to the growing importance of maritime trade.

The author of the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae* saw large Indian vessels on the Malabar coast, that were known as *sangara*. In one of the early Indian texts large vessels were referred to with the almost identical term, *sangada*. In the first centuries A.D. Egyptian traders used to send their ships to India, and Indian merchants, according to the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae* took up permanent residence on the island of Dioscorides (Socotra).

An interesting chapter in the history of maritime exploration in the ancient world was the voyage undertaken by the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien from India to China. He started out from Tamralipti, making his way first to Sri Lanka, then across the ocean to Java before finally returning to China.

Rome played an important part in the Oriental trade of that period. The Romans imported many goods from India and at the same time set up their own trading stations in the country. A particularly famous one of these was that at Arikamedu (near modern Pondicherry), where Roman coins, amphoras and Roman glass have been found. Trading in commodities from Southern India was very much to Rome's advantage, and it is no accident that large quantities of Roman coins have been found precisely in that part of India. There are records of several embassies India sent to the court of the emperors Augustus and Trajan. There are also records of the gift sent to Augustus by King Pandian who would appear to be the ruler of the South Indian Pandya kingdom.

Indian spices, in particular pepper, as well as perfumes, rare kinds of timber, fabrics, and also exotic birds and animals proved most popular in the West.

When the king of the Visigoths Alaric laid siege to Rome at the beginning of the fifth century, he demanded by way of ransom an enormous quantity of pepper which he was given. Classical writers tell of the Indian lions that were sent to Rome for display. Indian tigers were brought before the Emperor Claudius. Indian parrots proved especially popular with the Roman public.

India also exported articles of ivory, silk, precious stones, shells, musk, iron and steel. In the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae* there are references to the export of Indian slave-girls trained in the arts of music and dancing. In Pompeii an ivory statuette of the Indian goddess Lakshmi was found. Many ivory articles dating back to Kushana times have been found in Begram (Afghanistan).

India used to import certain commodities, as can be learnt from classical writers, archeological findings and, in particular, from the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae*. These goods would be imported from the West mainly via the port of Barygaza. India imported wine, papyrus, incense, certain metals, cereals (such as sesame), oils and honey. In this particular period the Great Silk Road assumed great importance, linking as it did the Far East with the West and passing by way of India too.

For merchants, just as for artisans, there existed associations which were also known as *shreni*.

### **The Varna and the Jati in the First Centuries A.D.**

The first centuries A.D. saw a continuation of those processes within the social estate structure which had begun in the preceding period: man's actual position in society, his property status come more and more to the fore. At the same time his lineage no longer possessed the decisive significance that it had had before. As Buddhism and Jainism gained more and more ground, so the role of the Brahmins as the all-important performers of religious rites became less pre-eminent.

Many Brahmin families were impoverished, and representatives of the Brahmin *varna* were obliged to take up other occupations. The role of the Brahmins in the ideological sphere declined, although later in connection with a new resurgence of Hinduism, their influence was enhanced. There were other new developments affecting the role of the *kshatriya varna*. The republics in which the *kshatriyas* had played the key role were gradually losing their importance. The practice of recruiting mercenaries into the army naturally left its mark on the status of the *kshatriyas*, the professional warriors. Like the Brahmin families, so too the *kshatriya* lines were sinking into poverty; members of other *varnas* were being appointed to public office more and more frequently, something which had previously been almost unheard of.

Interesting facts were noted down by the Chinese visitor to India, Hsüan Tsang. While he was in India the kaleidoscope of kings ruling over India was as follows: five *kshatriyas*, four *Brahmins*, two *vaishyas* and two *shudras*.

The disintegration of the *vaishya varna*, which had begun earlier, continued rapidly under the Gupta rulers. There was now little to distinguish the poor *vaishyas* from the *shudras*, whose position, evidently, as a result of the rapid growth of agriculture and the advance of the crafts, had to some extent improved. In the source material from that period there are more and more references to the use of *shudra* labour in agriculture. In his *Records of Western Countries* Hsüan Tsang presents the *shudras* as tillers of the land, while in the *Shastras* of the Gupta period a clear distinction is already drawn between the *shudras* and the slaves. Thus the traditional *varna* divisions were coming gradually to lose their former significance. The more important distinctions were now those of caste or *jati*. The *jatis* like the *varnas* were hereditary, and associated with specific professions. However these were smaller categories, sometimes no more than groups of people linked together by economic interests. The number of *jatis* gradually increased.

The formation of the *jati* continued far later. As a result of the division of labour and its specialisation there was a particularly marked growth in the number of castes in the towns, among the various categories of craftsmen. The number of castes in rural areas also grew. *Jati* existed as a social institution separate from the *varnas*. At the same time the *varna* principle was rigidly observed. In the Gupta period there were not as yet such strict laws regarding caste as those that were to emerge later; it was still possible in certain cases for castes to change their traditional occupations.

In inscriptions of the period it is stated that in Western India the association of silk weavers moved to another area after experiencing production problems. The weavers took up other professions: some became soldiers, archers and even bards which meant that from a social point of view, as regards the *varna* hierarchy, they had moved up the scale.

The Brahmins attempted to explain the emergence of *jati* by a mingling of the *varnas*. In view of the violations of the strict rules concerning contact between the *varnas*, the scholars versed in Brahmin law were concentrating their attention on the "purity" of the *varnas*. Only the children of parents belonging to one and the same *varna* were regarded as pure and legitimate. Even a marriage between a Brahmin and a *kshatriya* was seen as a departure from *varna* "law". Children of mixed marriages were assigned to a different category of persons than that of their parents, to a specific *jati*. This was how the Brahmins endeavoured to account for the *jati*, the new social groupings that had emerged as a result of social development, in particular the division of labour. The untouchables appeared. They stood outside the *varna* system and were at the very bottom of the social ladder.

These were the groups obliged to carry out the most menial work (refuse cleaners, cemetery sweepers, butchers, etc.); members of higher castes were not allowed to have anything to do with the untouchables who were sometimes singled out by specific marks indicating their low status. The untouchables did not enjoy any political rights.

#### RELIGIOUS TRENDS AND PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS IN THE EARLY CENTURIES A.D.

##### **Mahayana Buddhism**

Various trends and sects were to emerge amongst the followers of Buddhism very early in the history of that religion. Even the very first councils put forward differing interpretations of many tenets of the Buddhist doctrine. By the Mauryan period two main groups had emerged: the Sthaviravadinās (who adhered to the teaching of the

elders) and the Mahasanghikas (who favoured the large community and advocated more liberal rules).

This latter trend evidently provided the essential part of the Mahayana teaching (Great Vehicle or Great Way) whose adherents started to set themselves apart from those of the Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle or Low Way). The term *Hinayana* is not found very often in Buddhist writings. It was used to refer to the teachings accepted by the so-called orthodox Buddhists. There was no open conflict between the adherents of these two schools in India. Initially the adherents of the Mahayana doctrine were few in number. According to Hsüan Tsang they abided by the Hinayana rules of Vinaya. Even in the seventh century A.D. the Chinese pilgrim I Tsing recorded how adherents of the Hinayana and Mahayana teachings lived side by side in the same Buddhist monasteries in Northern India. He wrote that they abided by one and the same Vinaya rules and acknowledged the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism; however those who venerated *bodhisattvas* and read the Mahayana *sutras* were regarded as Mahayanists, and the rest were Buddhists of the Hinayana school.

The earliest Mahayana texts would appear to have been written as far back as the first century B.C., however a large number date from the first centuries A.D. Some of the earliest of these writings were the *Prajnaparamita sutras*, Chinese translations of which appeared as early as the end of the second century A.D. The most popular works of Mahayana Buddhism were the *Saddharmapundarikasutra* (White Lotus-sutra of the Good Law), the *Lankavatara-sutra* (Sutra on the Coming to Lanka) and the *Suvarnaprabhasasutra* (Sutra of the Golden Radiance).

The Mahayanists did not see Hinayana teaching as a hostile threat to their own beliefs or as an erroneous doctrine. They regarded it as a doctrine which was inadequate for the broad propagation of Buddhist ideas, and too individualistic. Asanga, one of the founders of the Mahayana school of Yogachara, drew attention to the limited nature of the Hinayana teaching. According to that teaching man should be preoccupied with salvation for himself alone, the attainment of enlightenment, of *nirvana* for himself, as an individual. Mahayana, on the other hand, laid emphasis upon compassion and help that should be given to all living creatures regardless of their individual characteristics. The Mahayanists regarded their teaching as the re-emergence of the true teaching of Buddha, which, they maintained, adherents of the Hinayana school (Vibhajavadinas and Sthaviravadinas) distorted and stifled through their egoism and individualism. This led them to refer to their own doctrine as the "Great Way" thus underlining the breadth of their interpretation of the idea of salvation and the broad range of followers won over to the teaching of Buddha.

One of the most important tenets of the Mahayana doctrine is that concerning the *bodhisattva*. The concept of the *bodhisattva* was also

to be found in the Hinayana doctrine, in particular among the followers of the later school of the Sarvastivadinās (Gautama Shakyamuni was held to be a *bodhisattva* before his enlightenment, i.e., before he became Buddha). The cult of the *bodhisattvas* assumed far greater importance for the Mahayanists. They saw him as a being possessed of the capacity to become a Buddha, who had been drawing near to the attainment of *nirvana*, but who out of great compassion to other creatures and the whole world forebore from the *nirvana*. For the Mahayanists the *bodhisattva* replaced the Hinayana ideal of the attainment of *arhantship*.

The Mahayanists held that one of the main weaknesses of Hinayana was the narrow limitations of its goal, salvation for oneself alone, and even the *arhant* (a Buddhist saint) does not in their eyes overcome completely the fetters of his own inner self; he attempts to achieve *nirvana* for himself, without thinking of others remaining within the circle of *samsara*, within the cycle of births and deaths. The Mahayanists taught that the *arhant* was unable fully to surmount the differences between himself and others and thus to achieve the state of his own "non-being". This made it logical for men to imitate not the *arhant*, that had concentrated all attention on his liberation, but the *bodhisattva*, who turned his back on worldly life in order to help others, men living in the day-to-day world.

The members of the Mahayana sect disapproved of the narrowness of the Hinayana beliefs. According to the Hinayana teaching only monks could attain *nirvana*, after making a complete break with worldly life, while the Mahayana sect believed that supreme salvation was accessible to laymen as well. In Mahayana texts it is constantly being emphasised that *bodhisattvas* do not seek after *nirvana* for themselves alone, but are called to strive after the achievement of happiness for the world as a whole, the attainment of *nirvana* for all living creatures. The *bodhisattva* accepts suffering of his own free will, in order to help others, and he refrains from seeking his own salvation for as long as all others have not been set free from suffering. In this sense all followers of Buddha are treated as a single entity. These tenets of Mahayana Buddhism made it very popular among laymen, for whom Mahayana beliefs opened the "path to salvation" with the promise of help from the compassionate *bodhisattvas*.

Quite different in the Mahayana beliefs was the interpretation of the image of Buddha, the founder of the teaching, and that of the actual concept "Buddha". While the Hinayana sect saw Buddha as a real historical figure pointing out to the faithful the paths and means of "salvation", the Mahayana sect saw him as the supreme absolute being, the cornerstone of the whole microcosm, who thus acquired a specific metaphysical and religious significance. Every living being is potentially capable of becoming a Buddha, because within him is contained a particular particle of the essence of Buddha (*buddhata*).



This Buddhahood pervades all that exists and manifests itself in "three bodies", which are the three facets of the one Buddha: the *dharmakaya* or body of *Dharma*, i.e., the cosmic manifestation, the *sambhogakaya* or body of enjoyment, i.e., the divine manifestation among supernatural creatures, and the *nirmanakaya* or created body (also known as the *Rupakaya* or Body of Image), i.e., the manifestation of Buddha in the image of man. The Mahayanists acknowledged the existence of several buddhas, of whom Gautama was but one. They held that through these manifestations in the "three bodies" Buddha brings salvation to all creatures in the cosmic, celestial and terrestrial worlds.

According to Mahayana beliefs, the buddhas and *bodhisattvas* become objects of worship. The ceremonial and ritual aspects of worship assume particular importance. In Buddhist art the Buddha comes to be depicted as the supreme being.

Since the Mahayanists believed that *nirvana* was attained with the help of the *bodhisattvas*, believers sought to assure themselves of the former's good will by means of rich offerings. In the first centuries A.D. the monasteries acquired all manner of valuable property; kings and other rich followers of Buddha donated land, large sums of money and other valuables to them.

The Mahayana teaching on *nirvana* was marked by unusual features, while *nirvana* was presented in different ways by the various Mahayana schools. But unlike the Hinayana approach the Mahayana teaching viewed *nirvana* not as the extinguishing of reality or its relinquishment but as reality itself. The Mahayana sect developed the teaching of the *paramitas* (the Perfections) with the aid of which the devout could attain moral perfection. There were six principal *paramitas*: generosity, virtuous behaviour, tolerance, spiritual vigour, contemplation and intuition enabling man to apprehend the idea of supreme enlightenment. Each of the *paramitas* was seen as a step to the attainment of supreme wisdom (*prajna*). Thus the fundamental tenets of the teachings adopted by the Hinayana and the Mahayana sects differed widely from each other, indeed some Buddhologists even regard Mahayana as a doctrine quite separate from Hinayana. Others see Mahayana beliefs as a continuation and extension of Hinayana concepts.

Despite the substantial differences between the two sects, they shared certain basic conceptions with regard to the exposition of doctrine. Both focussed attention on "salvation" and paths leading to it, regarded all that exists as changing and transient, both accepted the law of *Karma*, and viewed the attainment of *nirvana* as something within man's reach albeit by different paths.

## Schools of Mahayana Philosophy

The best known of these schools in the first centuries A.D. were the Madhyamika and the Yogachara schools. The outstanding philosophers Nagarjuna and Aryadeva, both of whom probably lived in the second century A.D., can be seen as the founders of the former school. Mahayana writings already existed at the time of these philosophers and indeed Nagarjuna makes references to them in his work.

The fundamental tenet of Madhyamika teaching was the doctrine of *Shunyata* (literally, the Void), and for this reason the school is frequently referred to as the Shunyavada. According to Nagarjuna everything which exists, whether it be material or spiritual, is unreal. At the same time the *shunya* is a negation of non-being, a complete absence of duality; it therefore had not a negative but a positive significance. The Madhyamikas then went on to conclude that *nirvana* and *samsara* were not opposites. They taught that after passing through all the *paramitas* and attaining the supreme level of moral perfection, object, as it were, ceases to differ from subject, *nirvanu* from the world, and existence from non-existence. The teaching of Buddha, his *Dharma*, was declared to be the *shunya*. Nagarjuna's ideas, which represented one of the most important events in the history of Buddhism, exerted a considerable influence upon the development of the ideas of Mahayana and religious and philosophical thought in ancient and early Middle Age India.

The philosophers Asanga and Vasubandhu (fourth and fifth centuries A.D.) are seen as the founders of the Yogachara school. This school accepted only man's consciousness or mind as real, and viewed the whole material world as an unreal illusion. This led the Yogacharas to concentrate their attention on consciousness and methods for perfecting man's contemplative faculties.

Mahayana (in particular the school of the Madhyamikas) was widely adopted in many Asian countries, in particular in the Far East. It was easily reconciled with local religions and absorbed their rituals. In India itself the influence of Buddhism underwent a marked decline during the Gupta period.

## The Decline of Buddhism. Hinduism

Despite the spread of Mahayanist ideas in the first centuries A.D. and the advance of Hinayana and Mahayana schools of philosophy, during the Gupta period and in particular immediately after it Buddhism declined in importance. In the country where it had first emerged, Buddhism was now in retreat. Chinese travellers of the period noted deserted monasteries, and the writings of the Gupta

period contain open attacks on Buddhist monks. To judge by the available data the Gupta kings worshipped Vishnu and Shiva, although at the same time they evidently pursued a policy of religious tolerance. Gradually North-Western India and Kashmir were to emerge as the centre of Buddhism. Meanwhile in the Ganges valley Vaishnavism and Shaivism were assuming more and more importance.

The decline of Buddhism coincided with another important event in the history of Indian religion and culture—namely the resurgence of Hinduism, although in practical terms many features of that religion and its accompanying rites had never died out. The amazing ease with which Hindu tradition absorbed various local religions, its philosophy, which admitted the simultaneous existence of numerous interpretations in the form of schools of thought that were virtually independent of each other, the preservation and development of traditional social institutions (this applied above all to the defence of the *varna* system), all served to make Hinduism, this unusual religious synthesis, more acceptable for the most diverse social strata than various heretical trends. By the beginning of the Middle Ages Hinayana Buddhism had practically disappeared in India after becoming the main religion of Sri Lanka, and later South-East Asia. The “northern” variation of Buddhism (Mahayana) still retained some degree of influence in India for several centuries to come, but gradually, both as regards its mythology and as regards its religious rites, it came to resemble Hinduism. Hinduism was exerting a growing influence on Buddhism and in Buddhist monasteries one can even find representations of Hindu divinities. It is interesting to note that Buddha was proclaimed to be one of the incarnations of the god Vishnu. Between the eighth and ninth centuries Hinduism came gradually to absorb all the strictly Indian Mahayana schools once and for all.

By the Gupta period orthodox Brahmanism had also undergone considerable changes. The old divinities had lost their popularity, the rituals laid down in the *Vedas* and the *Brahmanas* were by this time hopelessly out of date and seemed unnecessarily complicated. Nevertheless the religious and philosophical concepts found in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* made it possible to incorporate any local sects and beliefs into the Brahmanist tradition hallowed for centuries.

The emergence of the system that was to be known as Hinduism (or, to be more precise, *Hindi Dharma* or Indian Law) only after many centuries had elapsed (when it proved necessary in view of the Arab invasion to provide this whole group of sects with some overall designation) began long before the Gupta era and was linked with the first attempts to reconcile the mythology of Brahmanism with local beliefs of the native tribes (mostly Dravidian).

## Vaishnavism

The first of the two main schools of Hinduism emerged as early as the Mauryan period, but Vaishnavism only became widespread under the Gupta rulers. The main divinity, Vishnu, appears in the early texts under the name Narayana, who would appear to be the deity worshipped by the native tribes of Northern India. In the texts of the *Brahmanas* he is already referred to as the mighty god and is even on occasions placed higher than the later Vedic god Prajapati, the "creator of the universe".

Later Narayana became just another name for Vishnu, one of the Vedic variants of the Sun-god. The name Vishnu by all appearances would seem to be of local origin. Subsequently this divinity is referred to exclusively by the name of Vishnu, and the religious movement that proclaims him to be the supreme god becomes known as Vaishnavism.

The enormous popularity of this religion in India can be explained to a large extent by the truly unique capacity of this branch of Hinduism to assimilate various local beliefs and ceremonies of worship. This was possible thanks to the well elaborated system of *vyuhas* and *avatars*. The essence of the notion *vyuha* is that the all-powerful god Narayana-Vishnu consistently reveals himself in four different forms; this led to an incorporation of several popular local gods within the concept of Vishnu; among these divinities was the figure of Vasudeva who became almost more important in later Vaishnavite literature than Narayana himself. Many attributes of Vishnu as conceived in medieval times can be traced precisely to Vasudeva, who among other things was linked with the divine bird Garuda. The worship of Vasudeva, and later of Vishnu, came to embrace veneration of Sankarshana, to whom farming tribes paid homage.

The worship of Vishnu came to incorporate yet another divinity—Krishna, who was soon to become one of the most popular. God Krishna is depicted as a mischievous youth engaging in flirtation with Gopis. The system of *vyuha* made possible the incorporation of Vasudeva and Krishna in Vaishnavism.

Still more significant in its implications was the syncretic tendency of Vaishnavism connected with the idea of *avatara*. This word denotes "descent" or more precisely "the earthly incarnation of the divinity in the interests of man". Earlier literature mentions four *avatars* of Narayana-Vishnu, but later counts are as high as twenty-nine. This principle allowing the incorporation of diverse cults into one religion made possible the adoption of a wide variety of figures from all manner of religions into Vaishnavism. Limited space here makes it only possible to name the most famous among them: three of the forms in which Vishnu appears are those of animals—as a giant wild boar he saves mankind from perishing in the waters; at the hour of the

Flood, in the form of a fish he brought to safety the Indian ark, a ship on which the king of the Earth, Manu, was saved, and as a turtle he took part in the churning of the ocean. As the divine hero Rama he marries Sita (the goddess of agriculture) after freeing her from the demon king Ravana, and conquers Lanka. This theme later provided the core of Valmiki's famous *Ramayana*.

In connection with the history of early Vaishnavism it is most interesting to compare data to be gleaned from literary sources and material found in dated epigraphic documents.

In the grammar compiled by Panini (fifth or fourth centuries B.C.) reference is made to the worship of Vasudeva, who was traditionally held to have been a heroic *kshatriya*, the hero of a *kshatriya* association of *vrashnis* (within which the Vasudevas constituted a privileged family). Patanjali (second century B.C.) used both these motifs in his writing: in his work Vasudeva appears both as a *kshatriya* and as the object of religious veneration. The second motif is elaborated in particular detail in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, in which Vasudeva already appears as one of the manifestations of the supreme god Bhagavata.

References in Megasthenes' records to the "Indian Heracles" testify to the spread of Vasudeva worship in the early Mauryan period. This figure is described by the Seleucid ambassador as a heroic warrior and vanquisher of demons. The worship of Vasudeva, according to Indian sources, was particularly popular in Mathura; a point also made by Megasthenes in connection with Heracles. It can be assumed that the Greek writer was depicting that period of early Vaishnavism when Vasudeva was already deified but not yet equated with the figure of Krishna.

In the famous Heliodorus inscription at Besnagar (second century B.C.) there is mention of reverence of the "god of gods" Vasudeva, and, to judge by this inscription, the worship of Vasudeva was widespread not merely among Indians, but also among the Greeks inhabiting North-Western India.

On the basis of other pieces of epigraphic evidence from the end of the first millennium B.C. it can be concluded that the cults of Vishnu, Narayana and Vasudeva merged together as one at about that time. In the early centuries A.D. temples were already being erected to the Vaishnavite deities (Vishnu, Vasudeva and Sankarshana), a characteristic feature of medieval Hinduism. There is a reference for example to the temples built in honour of Sankarshana in the *Arthashastra*.

A feature which clearly distinguishes Hinduism not only from Brahmanism but also from the majority of other religions is that its teaching concerns not one but three gods, each of which ranks equal to the other two. This strictly Indian version of the "trinity" came to be known as the Trimurti. It includes the gods Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver) and Shiva (the Destroyer). The

first of these, Brahma, was incorporated from the Vedic pantheon; in the later religion he came to be regarded as the expression of the actual idea of creation, rather than as a separate god in his own right. Hardly any temples were erected in Brahma's honour as they were in honour of Vishnu and Shiva (and also Shakti, the Mother Goddess, who later assumed a prominent place among the Hindu gods), although Brahma is often mentioned in religious writings. At the same time each of these three gods reflected, as it were, the world as a whole. The followers of Vishnu referred to him not only as the custodian of the universe but also as its creator and destroyer. All three cosmogonic functions could also be assumed by Shiva. This feature of the Hindu religion inevitably made for religious tolerance, and also facilitated the coexistence of various religious and philosophical teachings within this tradition.

### Shaivism

Side by side with Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism also won great popularity. Shiva had gone down in Brahmanic literature as akin to Rudra—the Vedic god of thunderstorms and hurricanes surrounded by a host of cruel spirits hostile to man. This equation of Shiva and Rudra took place at a very late stage. In fact it was a question of the incorporation into Brahmanism of a local deity, whose cult was evidently linked with the religious beliefs of the people of the southern part of the sub-continent, in the way that Narayana-Vishnu reflected the religious beliefs of the population in the northern part of the country.

The cult of Shiva is associated with ecstasy. Shiva was seen as dancing on the site of funeral pyres, rubbing his body with the ashes of the dead and wearing a necklace of skulls instead of a garland around his neck. When he appears on earth in the guise of an impecunious ascetic, he uses a human skull as a begging bowl. Other of his accoutrements underline his terrible power and might: he is attired in a tiger skin, armed with a trident, a bow and an axe. However destruction is only one of the two forms of his activity. Shiva is the god of asceticism and animal sacrifice; he is also the protector of men in their ordinary day-to-day lives.

Evidence of the spread of Shaivism under the Magadha, Mauryan and Shunga rulers is to be gleaned from the writings of Panini, Patanjali and Megasthenes. In his grammar Panini writes of the followers of Shiva, and Patanjali refers to idols erected in his honour. Megasthenes' references to an "Indian Dionysius" are clearly to be linked with Shiva. He is described as a god popular among mountain-dwellers (cf. the "lord of the mountains" of Indian legend) who arranged special ceremonies with the beating of drums and sacrifices (very similar to the cult of Shiva).

Shiva is often represented on Kushana coins. His constant companions are Ganesha and Skanda who also appear previously to have been independent gods in their own right. The figure of Ganesha here has the body of a man and the head of an elephant with an enormous rat by his side, and is associated with the world of demons and the subterranean kingdom. His incorporation into the Shaivite pantheon is an artificial compromise that was made at a much later period.

Skanda—Shiva's devoted son—was represented as a chaste youth unversed in the secrets of love and bereft of a mother (the legend attributes his birth directly to Shiva himself). He is the king of mighty warriors, and therefore his struggle against hostile demons assumes a particularly significant place in the myths concerned with his life. The figure of Skanda is one of the most complex in Hindu tradition.

This assimilation of the mythological figures of Narayana-Vishnu and Shiva was followed by Brahmanism's adoption of the enormous and diverse range of cults practised throughout India to honour the supreme goddess. Essentially this process had already been initiated through the veneration of male gods who had been adopted by Hinduism together with their female hypostases. Lakshmi (spouse of Vishnu) and Uma or Parvati (wife of Shiva).

Hindu ritual differed in essential features from the Brahmanical variety: it evolved in the early Middle Ages and has been practised among orthodox Brahmins almost without modification up until the present day. In most cases Hinduism simply replaced the ancient gods with new divinities of a religion embracing the whole of India; thus Prajapati was equated with Brahma and to some extent with Narayana.

Yet some fundamentally new elements were introduced. The old religion had not required buildings set aside for worship, nor had it known material representations of deities in various forms. The Hindu religion at this new stage manifested itself above all in other forms of veneration: temples were regarded as "houses for the gods"; the activities of the priests were little more than the constant praying for the good of their "patrons"; idols served to embody the personal presence of the god concerned; each morning it would be subjected to ceremonial washing, sprinkled with fragrant waters, carried out into the streets of the town, so that the god might delight in the sight of his followers, and then be taken back into the temple, where it would be entertained with music and elaborate dances performed usually by professional women dancers.

Hindu architecture was developing apace at this period; the temples of medieval India constitute an important achievement in the history of Indian art.

## Bhagavad-Gita

Although it constitutes no more than a short episode in Book VI of the *Mahabharata* the *Song of the Bhagavata* proved immensely important in the religious life of India. All prominent authorities on Hinduism considered themselves bound to compile their commentaries to the Gita or at least to proclaim what their views were with regard to the teaching expounded therein. Europeans discovered the *Gita* as Indology was just taking shape and a large number of academic studies on this subject compiled in Europe was added to the ocean of commentaries already extant in India.

A short outline of the subject of this unique work might read as follows: the epic treating of the enmity between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, culminating in the grandiose battle at Kurukshetra, contains the following small episode—one of the five Pandava brothers, Arjuna, seeing his kinsmen assembled on the field of battle about to begin a fratricidal warfare, refuses to fight and seeks advice from his mentor in the martial arts, Krishna. The latter points out to him the demands of a *kshatriya*'s duty which make it impossible for him to avoid battle. Arjuna accepts his judgement as correct and joins the fray. However in the *Gita* itself the events bearing upon the main theme of the *Mahabharata* are only mentioned in the opening chapters of the poem. It consists in the main of a dialogue concerning man's destination, the essence of morality and the relationship between the earthly and the divine. Krishna, one of the many heroes in the epic, here appears as the earthly incarnation of the all-powerful god Bhagavata. His advice is not simply an answer to the question as to the righteous or unrighteous cause of the battle, but a rich philosophical exhortation, a whole religious and philosophical doctrine. The poem culminates in Arjuna's "insight"; he acknowledges himself to be not only a warrior, a *kshatriya*, and opponent of the Kauravas, but also a zealous follower of the new faith, to which Bhagavata himself, in the *avatara* of Krishna, has converted him.

The teaching as expounded in the poem took shape in an age when there existed side by side such widely differing religions and religious-philosophical trends as the Brahmanism of the *Upanishads*, Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikism, and when the philosophy of the Sankhya and Yoga schools was emerging. While interacting with these trends and incorporating some of their tenets, the *Gita* at the same time represented a completely independent and, in many respects, original complex of ideas. It represented an attempt, as it were, to reform Brahmanical ideas within the framework of orthodox tradition, so as to consolidate that tradition at a time of major social and spiritual change. For this reason the true nature of the teachings contained in the *Gita* can only be understood if they are compared with the ideas expounded in the *Upanishads* and those propagated by various reformatory teachings and sects.



Textual analysis has revealed that the *Gita* was written later than the early *Upanishads* (seventh to fifth century B.C.) and approximately coincides in time with the so-called middle *Upanishads* (second century B.C. to fourth century A.D.). This continuity was something quite deliberate on the part of the *Gita*'s authors. It is reflected not only in the similarity relating to many principles of doctrine and in the use of identical terms but also in direct, almost word-for-word coincidences.

The authors of the *Gita* also make no secret of their familiarity with early forms of Sankhya and Yoga philosophy (the *Gita* provides invaluable material on the genesis of these schools of philosophy). Numerous examples of identical terminology and philosophical propositions of the *Gita* and of early Buddhist writings are to be found, although the overall character of the two teachings is clearly very different. The religious and philosophical principles incorporated in the poem stand out as the result of the priesthood's endeavour to adapt traditional Brahmanical dogmas to the needs of the new age, while at the same time taking into account the achievements of other schools of religious and philosophical thought.

The new doctrine, like other Indian religions, sees as its main task the finding and description of paths which might lead the faithful to the attainment of the "supreme religious goal"—"liberation". The specific feature of the *Gita* is that (unlike the *Upanishads* for instance) it does not simply acknowledge the "ways of liberation" (*marga*) but elaborates in detail the conception of the three paths: the way of knowledge (*jnana-marga*), the way of action (*karma-marga*) and the way of "religious (or divine) love" (*bhakti-marga*). In the *Gita* there are no unequivocal indications as to which of the three is the most important. The order in which they are enumerated would appear to stem from the fact that in the teaching concerning "divine love" the religious pathos which permeates the poem reaches its culmination. Equally important is the authors' endeavour to consolidate the cult of Bhagavata-Krishna that is directly bound up with the idea of *bhakti*—emotional attachment to this divinity.

While in its presentation of *jnana-marga* the *Gita* closely resembles the *Upanishads*, the conception of *karma-marga* in the poem is something completely original. It is precisely the proposition relating to the "way of disinterested action" that provides one of the work's basic themes, that sets the *Gita* apart from other Indian schools of religious and philosophical thought proclaiming "liberation" (*moksha* or *nirvana*) as the single goal of human existence. This particular concept is not to be found in earlier texts: it was adopted by latter-day Hindus and acknowledged as the contribution of the *Gita* to India's spiritual heritage.

Here instead of the traditional dilemma found in teachings based on the ascetic principle—should man live in the world or renounce it?—priority is given to quite a different question, namely, the nature

of activity engaged in by the individual aspiring to the "religious ideal". The answer provided in the *Gita* is exceedingly simple: action ceases to be a fetter for man, when he engages in it in a disinterested way, i.e., when he regards it as something to which he is emotionally indifferent, but which is a bounden duty. When man attains such "disinterested activity" selfish stimuli are eliminated, there is no longer any thought of acquisition to be achieved through action. Moreover in carrying out his various actions such an individual is in no way aspiring to assert his ego, he is free from an "awareness of self" (from *ahankara*).

In other words, in its elaboration of the ideal of "liberation" for the individual from the fetters of earthly life and *ahankara*, as proclaimed in the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* provides a completely different conceptual expression for that ideal. The text of the poem is essentially devoted to an elucidation of this central idea.

The "way of love for God" (*bhakti*) is developed as a doctrine in the *Gita*. The description of *bhakti* is, in a definite sense, the culmination of the poem: the ideal outlined in the *Upanishads* of a renunciation of ambivalence and awareness of self finds expression in the worship of Krishna-Bhagavata, who is represented simultaneously as a personalised god and also as an analogy of the universal Absolute—Brahman.

The social aspect of the poem's content forms part of the religious and philosophical doctrine elaborated in it. While the interpretation of questions concerning the world's existence and ways of attaining the "supreme truth" provided in the *Gita* shows the influence of a number of ideas from unorthodox teachings and a reformed version of the Brahmanism of the *Upanishads*, the model for *varna* organisation it puts forward corresponds to the archaic concepts of the Vedic age. It goes even further in that direction in that it contains substantiation for a still more rigid and close-knit *varna* system which directly determined the nature of the "classical" caste system sanctified by later-day Hinduism.

However this "strictly social aspect" of the content of the *Gita* had ceased in many respects to be significantly relevant for future generations. The *Gita* came to be seen as the concentrated expression of the ideology of reformed Brahmanism, and later of Hinduism in general. Prominent thinkers traced their own, utterly original conceptions back to it, deliberately stressing this or that particular aspect of its content. In recent times the ideas found in this poem have been incorporated into a variety of theories, some of which are completely opposed to one another. Such prominent figures of twentieth-century India as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh (the latter in his capacity as a political leader, not a mystic philosopher) alluded to the ideas of the *Gita*. Jawaharlal Nehru stressed the importance of studying the ideas in the *Gita*. The *Song of the Bhagavata* has thus become an intrinsic part of the whole of

Indian culture, an undying symbol of the continuity of that heritage linking its earliest roots and the quests of the centuries that followed.

### **The Main Schools of Ancient Indian Philosophy**

Great importance was attached to philosophical knowledge in ancient India. Kautilya referred to philosophy as the light of all learning and the pillar of all rules and regulations.

In the *Upanishads* we already find signs of the conflict between the two main trends at work within the philosophical thought of ancient India—namely materialism and idealism. In the first centuries A.D. when schools of philosophy actually took shape this conflict assumed a particularly clear form. The materialist school (Lokayata, Charvaka) provided consistent and detailed elaborations of its conceptions. The flowering of philosophy in this period was made possible thanks to the major successes scored in the advance of scientific knowledge; a new stage in the historical and cultural development of ancient Indian society paved the way to it.

The study of ancient Indian philosophy shows that the thinkers in India at that time posed the same range of problems as the classical philosophers; moreover independently of each other they arrived at similar answers. In a number of cases the philosophers of ancient India reached those answers first.

### **Materialism in Ancient India and Its Schools**

In the history of Indian culture materialism has occupied a special place and has played a significant role.

The materialist tradition emerged in its most radical form in the sphere of philosophical quest; even at this early period the Indian materialist tradition was marked by the endeavour to free thought from dogmatic canons, outworn prejudices of religious fanaticism.

Written sources have preserved the names of a number of schools of materialist philosophy. The most influential of these was Lokayata; it is worth noting that the actual word used to denote this school of philosophy, means “attached to the earthly world” or “related to the people”, “found among the people” and this points clearly to the anti-idealist character of the teaching, to the wide proliferation of the ideas of the materialists of ancient India among the various strata of society in that period. The appearance of Lokayata (later the materialists came to be known mostly as the Charvakas, but this terminological difference did not reflect any fundamental differences of doctrine) marked an utterly new stage in the evolution of materialist ideas. The question as to the origins of Lokayata remains

controversial: sometimes it is linked with archaic views held by the native population, and this would explain the conflict between it and orthodox Brahmanical tradition. Indeed, some aspects of this teaching might appear to be such as would lead to a similar conclusion, however the overall character of the philosophical system reveals a high level of philosophical thought, while the fundamental tenets can in no way be reduced to primitive beliefs.

Lokayata was evidently widespread even early on and had followers both in the north and the south of the country. This is indicated both by the materialist current in the *Upanishads*, which has much in common with Lokayata ideas, and also by the references to it as such in Buddhist and Jainist writings. Kautilya referred to Lokayata as one of the three philosophical doctrines, that, in his opinion, possessed intrinsic value. There are references to representatives of this school in other ancient Indian writings, in the epics, in Patanjali's grammar, in the *Harshacharita*, etc. The actual writings of Indian materialists of the ancient period have not been preserved, having evidently been destroyed by their philosophical opponents. However an analysis of their treatises (detailed, albeit tendentious) is to be found in the works of the famous Vedanta philosopher Shankara, in the compendiums of Madhava, Jayantabhata and the Jain commentator Haribhadra. Tamil writings from the late Middle Ages provide a concise, but most pithy account of the fundamental principles of the materialist tradition in India. To judge by these texts, materialism provided the main opposition to Hindu tradition in Southern India during this period.

Thus we are not dealing here with a chance episode in the history of India's cultural development, as certain scholars have attempted to qualify it on various occasions. The evolution of this school continued over a period of almost two thousand years and the constant polemics between the materialists and the followers of philosophical movements of a religious bias testifies to the intensity of the struggle between these two main philosophical trends—the materialist and the idealist—in both the ancient period and the Middle Ages.

The first reference to the ideas of the Lokayata school is found in the *Upanishads*. The legendary founder of this school is represented as the deified sage Brihaspati, although according to the epics he often engaged in actions incompatible with the dictates of orthodox tradition. It is interesting to note that in the *Upanishads* Brihaspati proclaims a false teaching designed to undermine the Asuras by turning them away from the truth. It presents a variant of the ancient materialist text that has been lent a polemical slant by its editors. The Asuras are assured that the only essence of all living creation is the body, while the soul is nothing more than an illusion.

More detailed references to materialist teachings are found in the *Mahabharata*. Interestingly enough they are spoken by venerable sages, who were recognised by Brahmanical tradition. In the

section entitled *Mokshadharma* (from Book XII of the poem) there is among other things an exposition of the views of "Bharadvaja Guru", who comes forth here as the immediate forerunner of Lokayata philosophers. In tones of extreme scepticism he refers to the idea of the soul's existence after death, "the favourable new birth" that supposedly is secured through observance of ritual ceremonies and the bringing of offerings to the priest. Bharadvaja mocks the believer who, after giving the Brahman his cow, dreams of receiving in return all manner of boons in the next birth.

Bharadvaja contrasts the religious concepts of the transmigration of souls with the materialist notion of the natural transition of one form of life into another according to the laws at work within Nature.

Such an important step forward for rationalist, and materialist, ideas would have been unthinkable without significant progress in scientific knowledge, in particular in the fields of mathematics, physics and the natural sciences.

The concept of the elements and their role in the moulding of consciousness was bound up with achievements in specific fields of knowledge that help to explain the processes at work within Nature. The materialists stressed constantly that the object of their investigation was the world as perceived through the senses, that only being that can be analysed could be the meaningful object of scientific deductions. They denied supernatural phenomena because experimentation could not provide any evidence relating to them.

The Lokayata doctrine started out from a thesis concerning sense perception (*pratyaksha*) as the only source of real knowledge about the world (*pramana*); meanwhile it stated that assertions from those in authority, revelations or religious texts could not add anything to ideas gleaned from experience.

The Lokayata followers saw the universe as eternal and believed that its laws regulated the changes taking place in things consisting of elements. They were aware of the complex nature of the question as to the origins of life and thought and did not attempt to reduce higher forms of life to lower ones. They maintained that consciousness was the result of an extraordinarily diversified manifestation of basic elements.

The argument with which the Lokayatas countered the "Karma principle", universally accepted by Indian idealist thinkers, was most interesting. They asked why, if the soul is capable of transferring itself from one body to another, does not man remember his previous incarnations or if the individual is reborn in a new body after death, then why does he not attempt to assume his former aspect out of love for his relatives and beloved ones?

In their rejection of the *Karma* the Lokayatas were opposing not merely orthodox tradition, but all other philosophical and religious-philosophical movements. Their position was therefore unique in the history of thought of ancient and medieval India. The boldness of the

ideas they put forward is all the more striking in view of the fact that their main theses date back to a very early period.

The ethical principles of the materialists appeared to their opponents to be the weakest point in their doctrine. The Lokayatas were accused of attachment to inordinate pleasures, to the joys of earthly life (hedonism). This view is to be found even in many modern studies of the period. In actual fact the ethical ideas of the Lokayatas were quite different. In most of the treatises expounding the principles of the Lokayata teaching there were no appeals for amorality or unbridled behaviour (even though these treatises were written by men who opposed the teaching). The crux of their teaching is rejection of the religious ethical ideal and the concomitant nihilistic attitudes to any manifestations of joy or delight in being.

It is important to stress that the Lokayatas and Charvakas never supported selfish attitudes to the real world surrounding man. On the contrary, they saw man's normal existence as something only possible if he was at one with Nature. Moderation was seen as the prime virtue and the individual's "natural hedonism" as something held in check, or regulated by this virtue. A similar attitude was inherent in various schools of classical philosophy—particularly Epicureanism.

Unfortunately very little is known of the social views of the Charvakas. This makes the statements of Bharadvaja particularly valuable. He comes out against the *varnas* and there is reason to assume that the Lokayatas remained true to the principles of rationalist radicalism not only in their philosophy, but also with regard to social questions.

In general the differences in the fundamental principles of the two traditions—materialist and idealist—were so basic that each side would not endeavour to obscure the principles of the opposing side, but on the contrary overstated them in order to emphasise their unacceptability to their side. The materialists not only rejected the authority of the *Vedas* but also the ideal of religious (to be precise, mystical) salvation, the idea of the transmigration of souls and the law of the *Karma*. The bold approach, which this represented, can be seen most clearly of all from the fact that neither the Jainas nor the Buddhists, despite their negative view of Brahmanist ideology, could bring themselves to call into question either of these theses. The next step from this rejection was the rejection of all kinds of ritual and veneration for a god (not only Vedic ones); moreover these outward forms of religiosity were now criticised not as being "primitive" as compared to the more analytical exposition of religious truth, but they were rejected altogether.

The Indian materialists can be seen to have been consistent in their radicalism and their readiness to combat any time-honoured prejudices in either the philosophical or the social sphere. Despite opposition from powerful adversaries (the orthodox Brahmins not only monopolised the right to "preserve texts", so important in a

country where manuscripts that were not recopied were likely to decompose rapidly because of the climate, but also endeavoured to maintain their hold on the "levers" of social power), the materialist tradition continued in India for many centuries. Its influence on other trends in Indian thought was enormous. Ancient Indian materialist thought played an important part in the history of world philosophy: its tenets, the boldness and depth of its approach, were not only on a par with the achievements of classical philosophers but often outstripped them.

### **The Six Darshanas. The Sankhya**

The philosophy associated with Hinduism is traditionally divided into six *darshanas* or schools. The feature they share which determines their religious association is their acknowledgement of the authority of the *Vedas*, the law of the *Karma* and belief in the "ultimate (i.e., mystical) liberation" as the main goal of man's existence. These systems differ considerably: many of the philosophical concepts they incorporate vary, indeed they are often even opposed to each other.

The origin and nature of Sankhya philosophy is a complicated question. Discussion as to the true nature of this school of philosophy has been going on for close on a hundred and fifty years and extreme views are voiced on this subject: the Sankhya is presented as a religious, mystical teaching and also as a materialist doctrine. This divergence can be explained first and foremost by the fact that in its classical form the Sankhya emerges as an expression of philosophical dualism.

The Sankhya came into being at a very early stage. Only a few of the *Upanishads* precede it and it provides a fuller expression of the spontaneous materialism of that distant age. Kautilya referred to "three philosophies"—the Sankhya, the Yoga and the Lokayata. Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra* (an early Vedanta work of the second century B.C.) attacks certain of its propositions. During the Mauryan period the Sankhya was probably already an independent system that played a significant role in the intellectual life of ancient India.

The foundation of this system is traditionally attributed to the sage Kapila. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (V.2) mentions a certain "red rishi" (*kapila* means dark red) but it is far from definite that he was actually the founder of the school. The following compromise solution to the problem is now the most commonly accepted in academic circles: the first or one of the first to formulate these ideas was indeed called Kapila, however it is impossible to establish whether the Kapila referred to in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* is the same one. His works and those of his pupils, Asura and Pan-chashikha, have not survived although there is no doubt that these

three writers were real and not fictional figures. Asura's name is encountered several times in the epics, Ishvarakrishna's *Sankhya-karika* mentions Panchashikha, whom the author of the treatise referred to as his predecessor.

Ishvarakrishna's work that appears to date to the fourth-fifth centuries A.D. is a re-working of the original form of the teaching. This is confirmed if we compare the text of the *Karika* with remarks about the Sankhya in earlier treatises (for example in Badarayana's writing) and also from references in Buddhist works. Unlike the vast majority of philosophical works in India that were not linked with Buddhism the *Sankhya-karika* was translated into Chinese and became known to the Mahayanists.

It is difficult to form any precise picture of the original Sankhya teaching. The most useful key is provided by Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra*. Badarayana as an opponent of early Sankhya teaching provides a consistent account of those of its specific characteristics which conflicted with the ideas of the Vedantist school and other related currents of thought in Indian philosophy, that were elaborating the idealist concepts of the *Upanishads*. The author of the *Brahma Sutra* defines the Sankhya as "pradhana-karana-vada" (the teaching on Nature as the universal source) or "achetana-karana-vada" (the teaching that the foundation of the world is something without consciousness, i.e., matter or Nature). He stressed that both principles were quite unacceptable for the Vedantists who held the Brahman, or "pure consciousness" to be the initial cause of the world.

Badarayana saw Sankhya philosophy as the main opposing side to Vedanta probably in view of the influence which it enjoyed and its conceptual incompatibility with his own beliefs. He believed that if the propositions of the Sankhya were repudiated, then all materialist theories without exception would be robbed of their foundation. On this matter Shankara was in agreement with him. In his detailed commentary of the various sections of the *Brahma Sutra* dealing with the Sankhya, he maintained that for the Vedantists a triumph over this particular teaching would mean a triumph over other opponents. The teaching concerning *pradhana* (matter or Nature) as the initial cause of the world, provided, in Shankara's eyes, a universal theoretical foundation for any atomistic ideas whatsoever. Many texts (those in which an orthodox pro-Brahman line predominated) contained no references to the Sankhya, but their marked reluctance to refer to either that teaching or the Lokayata can be explained by the fact that those two teachings were seen as closely related to each other. The main thesis of the Sankhya school lies in the assertion that the material initial cause of the world—the *prakriti* or *pradhana*—had existed since time began and was not influenced by any factors outside itself. Insofar as the word *prakriti* means Nature, this term was usually translated as Nature when occurring in Sankhya texts. However, a number of scholars have demonstrated convincingly that



a more exact translation would be "matter", for in the treatise the word *mula-prakriti* (primordial Nature) is used on a par with *prakriti* which stresses the universality of *prakriti* as the original source of all forms of being.

The latter is found in two forms: *vyakta* (manifest) and *avyakta* (non-manifest). These concepts adopted from the *Upanishads* are interpreted in a different light in the Sankhya. Whereas in the *Upanishads* the "manifest", i.e., the world of that which can be perceived via the senses and which from a philosophical point of view is unreal, is contrasted with the "non-manifest", i.e., that which is inaccessible to the senses but embodies the only reality—the Absolute (the Brahman), in the Sankhya teaching two equally real forms of existence of matter are described: the "manifest" (Nature) is presented as the totality of concrete, spontaneously perceived things, while the "non-manifest", reflecting the very principle of the world's materiality, is seen as present to an equal degree in any thing. The "non-manifest" is the potential receptacle of all possible forms. The process of the world's creation finds expression precisely in the disintegration of this "primordial whole" into non-material and material forms that differ from the initial cause no more than articles of pottery differ from the clay out of which they are made.

Yet how do the formation of the world and its subsequent changes proceed? In order to understand the answer to this question provided in the Sankhya, we need to dwell on the theory of causality elaborated by the philosophers of this school, a theory which came to be known as *sat-karya-vada* (the teaching concerning the presence of effect in the cause giving rise to that effect). According to them, if effect were not present in cause, it would emerge from nothing as it were, i.e., each new phenomenon would require the intervention of a supernatural element. Indeed, any particular action can only stem from a specific initial cause: curds are produced from milk, fabric from yarn, etc. Moreover each new thing to emerge retains a link with the cause that shaped it: the weight of a table is equal to the weight of the wood used to fashion it, the weight of a jug is equal to that of the clay used to make it. However, a simple acknowledgement of the presence of effect in cause would mean that the world is something fixed and static, incapable of change: all effects would have to manifest themselves immediately and simultaneously. The teachers of the Sankhya school made it clear that effect is potentially present in cause, in a concealed form, and that a number of concrete conditions are required for it to be realised. The actual transition of cause into effect is mediated by a host of secondary circumstances which alone are capable of revealing the possibilities contained in the cause.

In the medieval compendium of philosophical writings from different schools, the work of Madhava, the *Sarvadarshana sangraha* mentions two theories of causality elaborated in India during the

ancient period and the Middle Ages: the *parinama-vada* (teaching concerning the reality of the transformation of cause into effect) and the *vivarta-vada* (teaching of the illusory nature of effect).

The first theory is associated with the Sankhya, the second with the Vedantists. These teachings are commonly classified as two answers to the question as to the nature of the relationship between cause and effect. Here once again the Sankhya philosophers defended the materialist approach, seeing the transformation of one set of phenomena into another as a real process with a material foundation. The Vedantists, on the other hand, took an idealist view of this question, since they only regarded the Absolute (the Brahman) as genuinely extant, while things and their modifications they saw as nothing more than an illusion.

Another cornerstone of Sankhya teaching was its theory of evolution presenting matter as something which originally existed in an integral "non-manifest" form. Its transformation into a world of objects and beings accessible to our senses, is effected through three *gunas* or the three "reals", the combinations of which determine the movement and development of the universe. The names of the *gunas* reflect their nature: *Tamas* (darkness), *Rajas* (passion) and *Sattva* (essence, truth). The most important of these, *Rajas* embodied the principle of energy and activity, *Tamas* that of inertia and *Sattva*, consciousness, equanimity and tranquillity. A reference to the three reals or "qualities of existence" is found as early as the *Upanishads*, however in the Sankhya teaching the concept is lent a fundamentally new significance. The reals are associated with the central principle of the teaching—the material nature of the world's initial cause. The *guna* is seen as the "thread" or "cord", the "quality" or "virtue". The incorporation of two different concepts ("cord" and "quality") in one word gave rise to those metaphors which the founders of the teaching used to elucidate the already familiar "theory of the *gunas*". The *prakriti* was likened to a rope woven from three strands. They taught, that any thing inevitably incorporated all three *gunas* at the same time, while the ratio of the three components changed, depending upon the way in which matter manifested itself.

The difference between the "early" Sankhya and the "classical" variety can only be conjectured at, yet the available evidence suggests that the materialist aspect of the teaching was particularly well developed in the early teaching. It would however be a crude vulgarisation to declare the Sankhya teaching as a whole to be materialist. The dualism inherent in the doctrine comes particularly clearly to the fore in Ishvarakrishna's treatise.

Here we encounter on a par with the *prakriti*, that creates and shapes the world, the *purusha*—pure consciousness—which is independent of the *prakriti*. There is reason to believe that *purusha* as presented in the Sankhya teaching can be traced back to the *Upanishads*.

The *purusha* is not action, its essence is contemplation. It is present in all things and they come to exist only thanks to the presence of the *purusha*. It is elusive and defies cognition, yet it is present in any, even the most insignificant, material thing. The joining together of the *purusha* and the *prakriti* (the spirit with Nature) gives rise to twenty-three elements, that is, the primordial forms of existence, which, according to the Sankhya, include both purely spiritual essences (such as intellect) and also those that are utterly material (water, earth, air, etc.). The dualism of the Sankhya teaching also made itself felt in its attempt to combine an almost materialist idea of "Nature's independent movement" (the presence of the *purusha* is implied in each of its manifestations) with the ideal of religious liberation, which accords entirely with the orthodox tradition of the *Upanishads*. The Sankhya proclaims that only after apprehending the natural movement of things can man come to understand the limitless supremacy of the constant, unchanging spirit over changing, unstable material Nature. Following on from this idea came the appeal for self-absorption and meditation.

In an attempt to explain the existence side by side of *prakriti* and the *purusha* Ishvarakrishna resorted to the following metaphor: *prakriti* is represented as a blind man able to move about and *purusha* as a man endowed with sight but unable to move. In this way the proponents of "classical" Sankhya attempted to bring together the earlier materialist conception of the existence of Nature with the idea of some kind of spiritual substance existing side by side with Nature.

The fact that the Sankhya is referred to in the *Arthashastra*, the *Brahma Sutra*, the epic poems, Charaka's medical treatise and in the *Manava Dharmashastra* shows that the teaching had become widespread in the early years of our era.

The Sankhya teaching exerted an enormous influence on both secular culture and on various religious movements. The materialist element was gradually ousted from the teaching, yet the school's central idea was nevertheless still clearly expressed, namely the rejection of a supreme Absolute in any form whatever and the highly consistent rejection of any idea of a personalised anthropomorphic divinity.

The idea first put forward in the Sankhya teaching of a "primordial nature" (*prakriti*) capable of systematic self-development represented a major contribution to the emergence of an all-Indian materialist tradition in ancient times and the Middle Ages.

### The Yoga

Among the *darshanas* a special place is assigned to Yoga. Usually this word conveys a series of physical exercises designed to set man into a trance-like state, or simply a type of gymnastics aimed at bringing out the body's latent physical potentialities and enhancing

man's control over his mental state (the term was adopted precisely with this last sense in Europe in the nineteenth century). In actual fact however Yoga is a well-developed philosophical teaching possessing highly original components all of its own.

Classical Yoga is seen as dating from Patanjali's treatise the *Yoga-sutra*, which contains all the basic propositions of the teaching. They were later developed in a host of subsequent writings, for example in Vyasa's commentary on the *Yoga-sutra* entitled *Vyasa-bhashya* (fourth century), in Vachaspati's *Tattvavaisharadi* (ninth century). They elaborated the terminology of the Yoga school and provided information important for an understanding of certain excerpts from this *Sutra*.

The Sankhya and Yoga schools are traditionally regarded as complementary systems in India. Indeed, many of the propositions of the Sankhya school (dualism, the teaching concerning the twenty-five elements, etc.) are also accepted by the Yoga school. Nevertheless Yoga philosophers were inclined to regard these as secondary aspects of their doctrine, while they concentrated their attention on psychology, the theory of knowledge and practical methods for achieving psychophysical control over the body. In addition, the Yoga philosophers announced theirs to be a theistic school, a claim not made by the Sankhya school.

The interpretation of psychological categories is considered to be the most important contribution made by Yoga to the history of Indian philosophy. The most vital of these is *chitta* (the mind or rather the concentration of all potentially possible forms of man's mental activity). According to Patanjali, *chitta* is an empirical fact, although it expresses something more than the simple reproduction of specific states of the individual. It is assumed that its inner nature remains unchanged, and all manifestations of the individual's psyche are no more than modifications. The *chitta* acts and lives in accordance with the real laws of the material world's existence. However the states of man accessible to direct observation are seen as its distorted development, as deviation from one's own original essence. Practically manifested mental conditions are referred to as *kleshas* (constraint, suffering): it is assumed that the original and indefinable condition of being for the *chitta* consists in freedom from these.

Patanjali lists five *kleshas*; moreover the nature of his list and the order followed provide a fairly clear picture of the overall idea behind the system. The "list" opens with *avidya* (ignorance) that finds expression in man's predisposition to see the inconstant as constant, and the transitory as eternal. Here the basic principle of the idealist trend found in the *Upanishads* is transferred to the sphere of the individual's psychology: the visible multitude and the material nature of external objects is illusory, only what is single, unified and intangible is real. The *Asmita* is the equation of the ego with man's physical body and his individual psychological attributes. This

reflects a trend that can be traced back to the *Upanishads*—the contrasting of the “cosmic soul of the universe” (*Atman Brahman*) with the concrete ego of the individual. The third *klesha*—*raga*—consists in a thirst for pleasures, delights and success in life. It is countered by *dvesha*—hatred for everything which stands in the way of pleasure. At the end of the list comes *abhinivesha*, an instinctive love of life and fear of losing it.

The theory of knowledge elaborated in Patanjali’s work is also distinguished by a number of original ideas. On coming into contact with the external world (objective reality according to the *Yoga-sutra* exists outside man too—here it would appear the influence of the Sankhya makes itself felt: only “liberation” means at the same time an end to existence and Nature and the ego apprehending objective reality), the *chitta* evolves its own ways of cognising the same. Yoga philosophers elaborate in detail the principles for defining the similarities and differences between things and phenomena. The logical workings of human consciousness make it possible to establish at first elementary analogies, and later more complex patterns of development of material phenomena.

Of central importance for Patanjali and his followers are rules for a psychological discipline for the individual that has a religious orientation, the so-called eightfold path of Yoga. The description of the techniques facilitating the mastering of these “means of ascent” takes up most of all Yoga treatises.

The philosophical doctrine of Yoga culminates in descriptions of the “absolute being” holding sway over the world (*Ishvara*). He is possessed of all “perfections” and assists the faithful in the attainment of the “supreme goal”. It is revealing to note that in Patanjali’s writing there are few references to *Ishvara*, and that such excerpts as do refer to him stand aloof, as it were, rather than form an integral part of the treatise. Early Yoga which subscribed to the cosmological views of the Sankhya virtually left no room for the activity of a personalised god. In a number of excerpts it is even maintained that *Ishvara* is no more than the object of religious emotions and possesses no ontological significance. However it should be pointed out that the adherents of that school of philosophy paid homage to a personalised god, which brought their views more on a par with orthodox tradition and the practical aspects of the Hindu cult.

All in all study of this original philosophical system makes it possible to elucidate more effectively the complex development of the correlations between the various trends in the philosophical thought of ancient India. At the same time it brings out the close link between philosophy and the achievements of certain scientific disciplines: “the eightfold path of Yoga” could not have come into being without advances in the spheres of anatomy, physiology and psychology.

## The Nyaya and Vaisheshika Schools

These two philosophical systems which emerged in the first century A.D. and had taken definitive shape by the Gupta period were closely linked with each other, and this was no mere coincidence. They both tended towards a rationalist explanation for natural phenomena although the first school paid particular attention to problems of gnosiology and was preoccupied with logic as an instrument of cognition (later the word *nyaya* was used to denote logic); the second was more concerned with doctrines concerning being and the essences that constitute being. The thinkers from these schools never indulged in polemics against each other: the Nyayas accepted the metaphysics of the Vaisheshika school, for they regarded it as a natural continuation of their own theory of knowledge.

The philosophical system initially elaborated by the Vaisheshikas constituted an integral part of the rationalist tradition in India. However it differed from the Lokayata doctrine insofar as it later admitted of a large number of particularised and most significant concessions to idealism and theism.

The word Vaisheshika is derived from the Sanskrit word *vishesha* (particularity, or variety) which makes the name of this school correspond closely to the essence of the doctrine itself. The crux of this teaching is the correlation of what is general and what is particular. Its adherents viewed the general and the concrete as components of a single system for the elucidation of being; at the same time, the particular was established as something immediately perceptible, and the general as the result of the totality of data concerning the former processed by man's reason. This meant that the central issue for this school of philosophers was how to combine the particular and the multiple, how to make the transition from an actually perceptible object to generalising categories that served to elucidate being as a whole. Solutions put forward by this school do not always appear scientifically valid but the materialist point of departure for these searchings did not raise any doubts in that far-distant era too.

According to the founder of the school Kanada the world arose as a result of the interaction of atoms that had not been created by anyone but were eternal, indestructible. This central thesis makes it impossible to evaluate the Vaisheshika teaching as a theistic system, although later commentators of Kanada's writings attempted to find acknowledgement of the existence of god in them and also recognition of his intervention in the regular processes at work within nature. Atoms are divided into four groups, possessing the qualities of the four elements, and the various combinations in which they are linked together give rise to all inanimate objects and living creatures. The term *Dharma* is used in this context but not in the sense of category linked with moral or religious prescriptions, but as the most general

designation for the laws of natural development and relations of cause and effect. He starts out from the traditional principle of "cyclical cosmogony" (the world comes into being, develops and then perishes in the "universal catastrophe", after which the whole process begins again) but he presents it as something almost reminiscent of natural philosophy: atoms do not disappear at the moment of world catastrophe, all that happens is that the links between them are broken, those links which gave rise to the phenomena perceived by man. The rebirth of the universe moreover takes place as a result of a repeated linking together of atoms and proceeds without any intervention on the part of a divinity.

In contrast to the assertions made by representatives of the orthodox religio-philosophical schools Kanada proclaims that the processes at work within Nature are not connected in any way with the actions of "supranatural" beings. Admittedly he at no time actually denies the idea of god outright, however even scholars who adhered to idealist principles were obliged to point out that this should be regarded as an "outward" compromise with the propositions of religious tradition. Yet, in actual fact, the inner logic of the philosophical system elaborated by this outstanding thinker is really atheistic (insofar as it denies god as the creator of the world).

One of the main tenets of Kanada's teaching is that concerned with substance (*dravya*). It serves to express this or that aspect of the world's existence that emerges as the product of Nature's development starting from an elementary linking-together of atoms. The introduction of this category was most significant in that ancient period and in the Middle Ages since it represented an attempt to provide a solution to the question of the mechanisms through which the simple is transformed into the more complex, and the processes at work within the world are regulated. Substance is an objective fact independent of everything, which acts upon other substances and separate things (secondary outcomes of a particular substance or a combination of several substances) and is indestructible: "it is not demolished by cause or by effect". Kanada writes: "Substance can be defined in the following words: it is capable of action and possesses properties, and it is intrinsic to cause." Then he goes on to say: "Substance is the general cause of things, properties and actions", i.e., it has no origin outside itself (or to be more precise apart from the combinations of atoms that form it); it can move of its own accord and can therefore give rise to effects; their totality resulting from the activity of many substances constitutes the world.

Early Vaisheshika writings ignore the idea of the "universal soul" (*Paramatman*) and only acknowledge the idea of "individual spiritual substance" (*Atman*). In later writings the concept of *Paramatman*, adopted from Vedanta teaching, becomes part of the overall teaching. However all these distortions of the original essence of the doctrine

did not affect the materialist trend of the Vaisheshika school and the Nyaya theory of knowledge.

The significance of these schools in the history of Indian thought lies above all in the rare degree of emphasis laid upon questions of logic and epistemology. The first extant writing which provides a systematic exposition of knowledge in this sphere—Gautama's treatise, the *Nyaya-sutra*—demonstrates the extremely high level at which these logical categories have been elaborated.

Gautama took as his point of departure the reality of the external world, its independence of the subject, and the fundamental cognizability of the universe through the senses, that find their logical synthesis in the mind. The central issue in the Nyaya doctrine was expressed in the laws of "clear thinking". Images that take shape in the memory, single observations and assumptions are insufficient to provide an adequate conception of objects. The true criterion of their authenticity can only be provided through their correspondence to the testimony of experience. Only those communications of experience that have been "passed through" logical analysis can reveal the authentic essence of objects and phenomena.

The Nyaya teaching concerning the methods and ways of cognition, particularly those involving logic, is elaborated in great detail.

In his circumstantial comparison of the Nyaya syllogism with Aristotle's three-line syllogism which provided an essential element of Western logic, F. I. Shcherbatskoy called attention to the various parallels to be discerned in the evolution of logical categories in Greece and India and he found many features of Nyaya logic most interesting as pointers to the general laws underlying the emergence and crystallisation of these categories.

The contribution made by this school of philosophy to the creation and elaboration of logic as a separate field of knowledge was most considerable; it exerted an important and fruitful influence on Indian science as a whole, as was to come to light particularly clearly in the latter period of its development. The achievements of the Nyaya school laid the foundation for the development of the teaching of the outstanding logicians of ancient and early medieval India, Dinnaga and Dharmakirti.

Kanada's atomistic theory partly resembled similar ideas propounded by the Greeks, in particular Empedocles. The latter also recognised four elements (and moreover the same ones: earth, water, fire and air) and traced the world's diversity to combinations of these "eternal essences". Empedocles explained the formation of things by the mechanical linking together and disjoining of primordial particles and he distinguished conditionally between two opposing forces, those of love and hate. The periodic breaking up of matter into its component elements and its reconstitution in the process of their interaction Empedocles presented as dependent on the predominance of one or the other of the two above-mentioned "principles". This



proposition can readily be compared to the Vaisheshikas' thesis concerning the cyclical character of Nature's being, although the Greek philosopher did not extend the principle of periodic disappearance and renewal to the whole of the world that can be apprehended via the senses.

A certain similarity can also be traced between the Vaisheshika teaching and that of Democritus: he also traced material processes to the movement and interaction of indivisible particles or atoms. However Democritus' ideas differed from the teaching of the Vaisheshikas insofar as he saw atoms as absolutely homogeneous; he held that the differences between their various combinations were not qualitative but purely a matter of quantity. This analogy between the teaching of the Vaisheshikas and the views of the greatest representative of Greek materialism is most significant. It does not of course point to any direct influence exerted by India on the Greeks, but rather to certain parallels in the development of philosophical thought in the two civilisations.

### Mimamsa

The traditional list of the six *darshanas* always ends with the names of the Mimamsa and Vedanta schools. These were so closely linked that Vedanta is sometimes referred to as Uttara-Mimamsa ("Higher" or "Later" Mimamsa), while Mimamsa teaching itself was often designated as Purva, or original Mimamsa. However in actual fact there are significant differences between the two systems both as regards their fundamental principles and also the general spirit of their doctrines. It is impossible to determine which of the two schools of philosophy came into being first: all that can be established beyond any doubt is that their merging together into a single tradition took place in the late Middle Ages by which time Vedanta had come to predominate.

The Mimamsa school attempted to refer back consistently to the Vedas; in this endeavour it showed a reluctance to accept any compromise solutions, even more so than orthodox Hindu theology. It saw the texts of the Vedic collections—the *samhitās*—as the basis of all knowledge. Like many other Indian religions or philosophical systems the Mimamsa school was profoundly practical, but this emphasis on practice was of a very special type. The central issue of this philosophical system was concerned with the principles and patterns of ritual, correct ceremonies for worship. In its elaboration of this idea the Mimamsa school represents an essential deviation from the true spirit of the Vedic tradition. In the *Vedas* sacrifices were offered for the sake of the gods, while for the Mimamsa school gods existed for the sake of sacrifice. They cease to be the sovereigns of Nature, intervening in the movement of the elements and the life of men; they are no more than an essential link in the ritual pattern, for

without them the offering of sacrifice would cease to mean anything. It is therefore natural that in the Mimamsa texts pride of place goes to detailed and often casuistic interpretations of certain ritual prescriptions from the *Vedas* and *Brahmanas*.

An important aspect of Mimamsa philosophy, despite its prevailing preoccupation with religious problems, is its teaching with regard to knowledge. Jaimini, who is considered the founder of the Mimamsa school, includes among the six sources of "clear knowledge" (or *pramana*) testimony of the authority, i.e., the Vedic texts (*shabda*), however the other four sources listed in his treatise, the *Mimamsa-sutra*, are not linked with the school's overall religious orientation. These are perception via the senses, logical deduction, comparison and proposition.

While Nyaya teaching, generally speaking, uses deductive methods in relation to the idea of analogy, the Mimamsa school upholds the inductive method. The Mimamsa teaching which is orthodox in its ideals and the Nyaya teaching which is in many respects "heretical" treat one and the same issue, polemicising against each other in the process. This aspect of dispute is inherent in the Mimamsa school no less than in the others already discussed. The Mimamsa treatises are full of critical outbursts directed against their philosophical rivals.

The Mimamsakas (the followers of the Mimamsa school) introduce the idea of "proposition" or to be more precise "postulation". Its significance lies in the fact that if some phenomenon or other appears to us to be without cause, then we are forced to resort to indirect explanations for it, analysis of which enables us by means of elimination eventually to probe down to its true cause. So here for the first time in Indian thought there takes shape the idea of hypothesis and its role in the process of cognition. Admittedly, postulation (*arthapatti*) cannot be entirely identified with "hypothesis", insofar as "postulation" as used here denotes not assumption, but indisputable conclusion.

Also worthy of note is that the general view of the world upheld by the Mimamsa school was marked by a definite element of realism: the objective existence of the universe and its cognizability are not questioned, although Jaimini came out actively against not only the materialists but also against the Sankhya.

This realism of the Mimamsa school was particularly important in view of the fact that the system, unlike those treated earlier in this chapter, unconditionally adhered to the ritual principles of the *Vedas*. It is revealing to note that the then general tendency to investigate the veracity of traditional concepts and the endeavour to subject these to critical analysis made an impact even on such a profoundly orthodox teaching as that of the Mimamsa school.

## Vedanta

In the Middle Ages the influence of the Vedanta school was to become predominant, however this did not mean that it came into being later than the other *darshanas*: the first purely Vedanta work, the *Brahma-sutra*, attributed to the sage Badarayana, dates from the second century B.C. The Vedantists themselves were inclined to demonstrate that their teaching could be traced back to the *Upanishads*, the texts of which they regarded as the original source of all their philosophical constructions. The tendentiousness of this view is self-evident. Moreover Badarayana's treatise itself, which consists of a collection of short and not always comprehensible sayings, presents the main points of the teaching rather than reveals its specific nature. However, Badarayana expressed in that work the cardinal principle of the Vedanta teaching although it is brought out mainly by means of negative theses: the world is in no way derived from material forces: the only reality is Brahman (here, spiritual essence), and all that really is stems from it in all its forms. Typically enough the author of the *Brahma-sutra* who supports an extreme idealist point of view reacted sensitively to the materialist ideas of his age: this accounts for the polemical sharpness of the propositions directed against the Sankhya and the Lokayata schools.

The inordinate laconicism of Badarayana's writing naturally furthered the development of the commentatorial tradition: at the very dawn of the Middle Ages Gaudapada wrote the first of the commentaries on this doctrine that has been handed down to the present day. Later the Vedanta school split up into different movements, each named after their founder. These were the Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha and Nimbarka. Each of these thinkers wrote his fundamental work in the form of a commentary (*bhashya*) to Badarayana's treatise. However, only two of them—Shankara and Ramanuja—were actually to exert a significant influence on the evolution of the Vedanta teaching.

A large number of philosophical writings by Shankara (eighth century) and Ramanuja (twelfth century) have survived. According to Shankara's doctrine the world is an illusion born of the Absolute: material Nature is unreal, just as is the empirical "ego". Only Atman—a projection, as it were, of the Absolute—Brahman—affects the imaginary psychophysical complex which in everyday language is referred to as the human personality. The centuries-old dispute between the two main trends within the Vedanta movement can for all intents and purposes be reduced to questions of religious practice and mysticism: while Shankara regarded as correct and true only the "way of knowledge" (i.e., the understanding of the illusory nature of one's own being against the background of the universal and all-embracing reality of Brahman) and as a result upheld the idea that the "ego" and

"Atman-Brahman" were completely identical, Ramanuja, who upheld the "path of religious love" saw as the ultimate ideal the merging of the individual principle with the divinity, a merging in which the believer only comes into contact with the object of his faith, but does not become equal to it.

Shankara advocated all-embracing idealist monism and reduced or condensed the diverse phenomena of the external world to self-expression of the "cosmic Absolute"—Brahman. Gradually Shankara's teaching was equated to Vedanta teaching as a whole. Orthodox Hinduism proclaimed the teaching of that philosopher as its official doctrine.

Although the Vedanta school at a certain period became the predominant movement, this did not do away with the fact that it was only one of the traditional philosophical systems. Indeed various other movements with more ancient roots propagated new ideas. The external predominance of the Vedanta teaching did not rule out the broad influence of other schools, particularly the Vaisheshika and the Sankhya teaching.

## THE CULTURE OF THE KUSHANA AND GUPTA PERIODS

### Drama and Literature

Unfortunately only a small number of literary texts dating from the Kushana period have survived to the present day. Our knowledge of the development of Sanskrit literature in the early centuries A.D. is based on writings from the Gupta period. However, tradition associates the work of Ashvaghosha—an outstanding writer and playwright, one of the founders of Buddhist Sanskrit literature and a major philosopher—with the reign of Kanishka (the early second century A.D.). Many of his works remain unknown, but fragments of the following poems in Sanskrit have been preserved: *Buddhacharita* ("A Life of the Buddha"; the whole text has been preserved for posterity in Chinese and Tibetan translations), *Saundarananda* (Sundari and Nanda) and the drama *Shariputraprakarana* (A Drama Dealing with Shariputra's Conversion to Buddhism). In ancient India these works of Ashvaghosha's had enjoyed wide popularity, and the Chinese pilgrim I Tsing, who visited India in the seventh century, wrote that the "poem" so gladdened the heart of the reader that he never tired of repeating it over and over again.

Although the *Buddhacharita* and the *Shariputraprakarana* treated only Buddhist themes and propagated the teaching of Buddha they possessed poetic and artistic qualities. Ashvaghosha adheres to the epic tradition and his characters' lives are filled with drama and rich emotional experience.

In his plays Ashvaghosha lays the foundation of ancient Indian drama which was to come into its own in the works of such writers as Bhasa, Kalidasa and Shudraka. Thirteen plays are attributed to Bhasa but it is as yet difficult to establish which of these really were written by this remarkable dramatist. Bhasa also made use of the epic tradition, although his plays were constructed strictly according to the laws of classical drama. Some modern scholars maintain, and with ample grounds, that a number of the plays attributed to Bhasa are the most ancient models of Indian tragedy. This was, there is no doubt, a bold innovation on the part of Bhasa who thus defied established artistic canon. This trend in ancient Indian drama was developed by Shudraka, author of the play *Mrichchhakatika* (The Little Clay Cart), which tells of the ardent love of an impoverished merchant for a hetaera.

One of the pearls of ancient Indian literature is the work of Kalidasa (late fourth-early fifth century), poet and dramatist, whose writings represent an illustrious page in the history of world culture. Translations of Kalidasa's works penetrated to the West at the end of the eighteenth century and were rapturously received right from the outset. In Russia part of Kalidasa's play *Shakuntala* was translated by Nikolai Karamzin in 1792-1793. In the preface to this publication Karamzin wrote that the play contained poetry of outstanding beauty and was an example of the highest art.

It would appear that Kalidasa was a prolific writer but as yet scholars have only discovered three plays: *Shakuntala*, *Malavikagnimitra*, *Vikramorvashi* (Urvashi Won by Valour), the poem *Meghaduta* (the Cloud Messenger) and two epic poems: the *Kumara-sambhava* (the Birth of Kumara) and *Raghuvamsha* (Raghu's Line).

The core of all Kalidasa's writings is man and his emotions, his worldly concerns, his joys and sorrows. His work already represents a significant step forward in comparison with the writings of Ashvaghosha who depicted an idealised image of Buddha and his faithful disciples. Many of Kalidasa's heroes are kings: the poet not only extolled their exploits, but he also condemned their ignoble deeds. Some of Kalidasa's works bear witness to the advance of the epic poem, the so-called *mahakavya*. Both in his plays and poems Kalidasa uses highly dramatic subjects, while his descriptions of Nature and man's emotions are distinguished by their lyric quality and humanism. Without swerving from earlier traditions Kalidasa stood out as an innovator in many respects. This explains why his work has been so accessible to the minds and hearts of the peoples of India throughout many centuries.

In ancient India considerable advances were also made by the theatre. In the Gupta age special treatises concerning dramatic art started to appear, which provided detailed expositions of the aims of the theatre and theatrical entertainments, the various genres used in the theatre, etc.

One of these treatises has been handed down to the present day. Entitled the *Natyashastra*, it is attributed to Bharata and held by scholars to have been written in the early centuries A.D. It is aptly referred to as the encyclopaedia of the ancient Indian theatre. It treats various questions connected with dramatic art—theatre architecture, acting, types of dramatic works, music, staging, etc.

When ancient Indian plays first made their way to Europe, many scholars wrote that the Indian theatre owed its roots to ancient Greece. However it has since emerged beyond any doubt that the theatre in India came into being quite independently. Moreover, the Indian theatrical tradition goes further back than that of ancient Greece and is much richer as far as theory is concerned.

In the Gupta age the earliest of the *Puranas* were compiled. These collections of legends about gods, kings and heroes that embody the mythological and cosmological ideas of the ancient Indians were compiled over a very long period and subjected to far-reaching editing and modification.

Some of the *Dharmashastras* such as the *Laws of Yajnavalkya* (third century A.D.) or the *Laws of Narada* (fourth and fifth centuries A.D.) also date from the early centuries A.D. Worthy of note among the landmarks of Sanskrit literature is the *Panchatantra* (third and fourth centuries A.D.), a collection of tales and parables which is very popular both in India and beyond its borders. In the early Middle Ages translations of this work appeared in Pehlevi, Syriac and Arabic. In the Middle East the collection was known as *Kalila and Dimna*. Later the work became known in Europe and all in all the influence of the *Panchatantra* on both Eastern and Western literature was considerable.

It was also in the Gupta period that the first works of literature from Southern India written in Tamil appeared. One of the most famous of these early works in Tamil was the *Kural*—a collection of parables the compilation of which is traditionally ascribed to a representative of the farmers' caste, Tiruvalluvar. The *Kural* was undoubtedly based on material derived from folklore and already in ancient times won enormous popularity. In the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. collections of lyrical poems in Tamil also appeared. The literature of other South Indian peoples appeared later, in the early Middle Ages.

### Scientific Advance

The first centuries A.D. were marked by major scientific achievement. This was particularly true of such fields as mathematics, astronomy, medicine and chemistry. Scientific treatises relating to a number of disciplines appeared. Requirements of the economy did a good deal to promote the advance of mathematics. Mathematics was important in relation to the construction of religious edifices, and for purposes of worship.

In the ancient period and in the early Middle Ages lived the outstanding mathematicians Aryabhata (fifth and early sixth centuries), Varahamihira (sixth century) and Brahmagupta (late sixth and early seventh centuries), whose discoveries anticipated many scientific achievements of modern times. Aryabhata knew that  $\pi$  equalled 3.1416. The theorem known to us as Pythagoras' theorem was also known at that time. Aryabhata proposed an original solution in whole numbers to the linear equation with two unknowns that closely resembles modern solutions.

The ancient Indians evolved a system for calculation using zero, which was later taken over by the Arabs (the so-called Arabic numerals) and later from them by other peoples. The Aryabhata school was also familiar with sine and cosine.

Aryabhata's follower, Brahmagupta, put forward solutions for a whole series of equations.

Indian scholars of this period also scored important successes in the sphere of astronomy. Certain astronomical treatises of this period have been preserved, and these *siddhantas* bear witness to the high level of astronomical knowledge attained by the ancient Indians.

Scholars of the Gupta period were already acquainted with the movement of the heavenly bodies, the reasons for eclipses of the Sun and the Moon. Aryabhata put forward a brilliant thesis with regard to the Earth's rotation on its axis.

Brahmagupta (many centuries before Newton) suggested that objects fall to the ground as a result of terrestrial gravity.

Interesting material relating to astronomy, geography and mineralogy is found in Varahamihira's work *Brihat-samhita*.

Knowledge of the laws of chemistry was important by this time in connection with advances made in metallurgy. The ancient Indians were renowned for their steel smelting, their skills in preparing fast dyes, working fabrics and leather and the production of various drugs. The use of mercury is mentioned in a number of treatises. In the fifth century the first scientific treatises in the fields of chemistry and alchemy appeared. Some of these are traditionally attributed to the outstanding philosopher Nagarjuna.

Medicine also developed apace at this stage, and in particular anatomy. Medical writings of the first centuries A.D. contain detailed descriptions of the human body, expound methods for dissecting corpses and outline the functions of various organs. The human body is presented as a combination of the five principal elements: ether, fire, wind, water and earth, and, according to the ancient Indians, all bodily diseases resulted from changes in the proportions between these elements. Surgical intervention involving various instruments was a known practice by this time. Certain branches of medicine also acquired a separate identity such as pediatrics, neuropathology, pharmacology and otolaryngology. Great attention was devoted

to the identification and the treatment of diseases. Particular importance was attached to water treatments, herbal and dietetic cures.

Medical treatises have survived that were written by Charaka (second century A.D.) and Sushruta (fourth and fifth centuries A.D.). These texts include references to such complex operations as craniotomy, amputations of arms and legs and the removal of cataracts.

## Architecture

The Kushana and Gupta periods were marked by new developments in both secular and religious architecture. In about the year 150 B.C. a magnificent series of caves was built in Karle (near Bombay). The shrine or *chaitya* at this site—India's largest cave-temple—is approximately 38 metres long, over 14 metres wide and almost 14 metres high. In the hall there are two rows of columns, a *stupa* and many different stone sculptures. The light falls through special apertures with wooden ribs. Many figures in relief are carved into the façade: apart from that of the Buddha there are also statues of those who endowed the temple. The whole enormous complex was cut into the rock and it is striking in its magnificence. In the Gupta period cave architecture was developed further: a particularly striking example is provided by the cave-temples at Ajanta. The temples of that period usually had façades richly ornamented with sculptured figures.

Most of the religious and secular buildings of note during that period were built in wood, which accounts for the fact that they have not survived. However, all the stone buildings which survived from the Gupta period testify to high standards of architecture. One of the most ancient Hindu temples above ground is at Sanchi and dates from the fifth century A.D. The columns of the portico bear capitals decorated with figures of lions which resemble those of the famous lion capital on Ashoka's Pillar. The temple at Sanchi was built with reference to the finest traditions of Indian architecture.

A still earlier building was the small Buddhist temple at Nalanda (fourth century A.D.), the foundations of which have survived to this day. At Nalanda there was an enormous university complex attended by over 10,000 students, apart from numerous buildings designated for worship and ordinary houses.

In the fourth century A.D. work began on an enormous Buddhist temple at Bodh Gaya. Its main tower was 55 metres high, and this made it one of the highest Buddhist temples in the whole of Asia. Large Buddhist monasteries were also being built in North-Western India. As early as the second century A.D. work began on the Dharmarajika Monastery in Taxila and a whole complex of halls and subsidiary buildings had been completed by the fifth century A.D.



Excavations of the many layers to be found at the sites of ancient settlements have revealed remains of secular buildings dating from the early centuries A.D. The sculptures on the *stupas* in Sanchi and Amaravati give us an idea of these buildings: the houses of the period had several storeys and the royal palaces were of dazzling splendour.

### The Fine Arts

In the Kushana age a number of schools grew up in the world of fine arts and particularly in sculpture.

In Central Asia the local Bactrian school flourished; its work showed marked secular traits; in North-Western India there was the Gandhara school, in the Ganges valley, the Mathura school, and that of Amaravati in the Andhra.

A variety of outside influences can be discerned in Gandhara sculpture—Greek, Roman, Central Asian and it also has a strong Buddhist flavour. Some scholars suggested that sculptures of the Gandhara school were the work of Hellenised Indians, while others even held that they were the work of Roman craftsmen. Although the Western influence is indeed conspicuous here, the main source of inspiration for these sculptures came from local traditions. Buddha depicted in the image of man appears very early in Gandhara sculpture. Prior to this Buddha had been depicted by means of various symbols: a wheel (*chakra*), a throne, the Bodhi tree, etc. It is possible that this was the result of the influence of Mahayana ideas.

In some statues of Buddha and the bodhisattvas scholars point to what they see as the unmistakable influence of Apollo of the Belvedere, but many features of the Buddha as depicted by this school were based on purely local traditions. The material used was different and also the purposes for which sculpture was used. As a rule in India sculptures were an integral part of a particular building or other. The subjects were Indian but there is no doubt that many of the techniques used were Greek in inspiration. In the words of certain art historians a Gandhara sculptor had an Indian heart and Greek hands. Gandhara traditions in the world of sculpture exerted a major influence over fine arts in many countries of Central Asia and the Far East.

The Mathura school was highly original: as well as Buddhist sculptures a considerable proportion of the works produced were on secular themes; figures of Kushana rulers appear and also laymen—rich patrons of temples or monasteries. Here we find a regular portrait gallery. In the Mathura school the predominant influence to be felt is that of ancient Jaina or Mauryan sculpture. Worthy of note is the fact that in Mathura (it would appear, independently of the Gandhara school) anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha appear, perhaps even somewhat earlier than in

the North-Western part of the country. The figures of Buddha from Mathura create an earthly image of the preacher, but hints of a certain aloofness already make themselves felt at this stage.

In Amaravati sculpture provides as it were the complement to the Buddhist *stupa* built in the second century A.D. Scenes dealing in the main with the life of Buddha are depicted, but the whole tone of the sculptures is strictly local, conveying the specific principles underlying the artistic canon of that particular school. The influence of the artistic traditions of the North also makes itself felt.

In the Gupta age it is already more difficult to trace specific, distinctive characteristics of the various trends in art. A more homogeneous tradition in sculpture starts to grow up and this is based mainly on the traditions of the North Indian school in Mathura. The Buddhist interpretation of the image of Buddha is elaborated in more detail and a further stage is to be observed in the evolution of the representation of the human aspect of the teacher and preacher, who is now depicted as the supreme deified being.

In the later Gupta age the canons of Buddhist sculpture changed somewhat as a result of the decline of Buddhism; Buddha acquired uniform canonical and stylistic features, and sculptured portraits found in various parts of the country resemble each other closely. Good examples of these are the fifth-century statues of Buddha in Sultanganj (Bihar) and Sarnath (near Benares). The first figure, made of brass, was of a fairly impressive size—over two metres high and weighing close on a ton. Buddha is here already portrayed as the embodiment of divine power. He has a broad torso and narrow waist, and hardly perceptible muscles. The whole figure is executed in a special style: the head is slightly inclined, and the right arm is bent at the elbow in the “abhaya-mudra” pose. The figure of the preacher is conspicuously idealised: the pose is natural and unconstrained, conveying an impression of inner concentration, the face wears a blissful smile.

The resurgence of Hinduism also exerted a direct influence on Indian sculpture: sculptures of Vaishnavite and Shaivite gods became widespread. The majority of Hindu sculptures dating from the Gupta age depict Shiva. It is possible that the representation of Buddha as a man (characteristic of Buddhist sculpture during the early centuries A.D.) influenced the manner in which Hindu deities were depicted.

However the Hindus regarded the figures of their gods, even when lent a human countenance, as symbols, and for this reason they might well have several hands, each of which would symbolically be associated with a specific deity or the functions carried out by the latter.

Apart from strictly religious works, so-called semi-secular and secular sculpture also made definite advances in the Gupta period.

This age marked an important stage in the development of ancient Indian painting. The famous frescoes of Ajanta (in the present-day

state of Maharashtra),\* are true masterpieces of Indian and world art. As far as the technicalities of their execution were concerned these were not frescoes in the strict sense of the word. The paintings covered the walls and ceilings of twenty-nine caves. A wide variety of subjects was used: there were scenes from the life of the Buddha, illustrations of *jatakas*, portraits of the Buddha, figures of *yakshini*, various patterns, etc. Nature is magnificently depicted, as well as various scenes of everyday life, and scenes from the court. After visiting the Ajanta caves in the seventh century Hsuan Tsang wrote that "all that is great and all that is small" was depicted on the walls of the temple. The colours used are also remarkable, conveying as they do almost every available hue. The paintings were made on a dry surface.

Work started on the Ajanta frescoes before the Gupta period and they took several centuries to complete. The influence of these paintings not only on Indian culture but also on that of a number of other Eastern countries was truly enormous.

#### THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL LINKS BETWEEN ANCIENT INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

Even in its earliest history India maintained close links with many foreign countries. Over the centuries these contacts were developed and consolidated; Indian culture penetrated other ethno-cultural zones and a process of mutual cultural enrichment ensued.

The earliest and closest of these cultural ties were those linking India and Iran, for these can be traced as far back as Neolithic times. The ancient Indians and Iranians were closely related peoples both ethnically and linguistically. The period of particularly close Indo-Iranian ties began after the formation of the Achaemenid Empire, when certain areas of North-Western India became part of that empire. Achaemenid culture (architecture, sculpture) also influenced the development of Indian culture during the Mauryan age. Buddhism spread to Iran from India, and many Indian scientific achievements and works of art became known there.

Recent excavations made by Soviet archeologists in Central Asia show that there existed direct links between the southern parts of Central Asia and India as early as the Harappan age, but these became particularly intensive in the Kushana period. Central Asian influences made themselves felt in India after penetration by the Kushanas and the Shakas, while Buddhism spread to Central Asia and also knowledge of many of India's cultural achievements.

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\* The Ajanta region was not incorporated into the Gupta empire, but appears to have been part of the Vakataka state, as indicated in inscriptions found locally.

Judging by inscriptions found in Central Asia, Indians had already established settlements there during the Kushana and Gupta periods, and had built large monasteries. The most striking demonstration of this is provided by the Buddhist monasteries at Kara-Tepeh (near Termez in the first centuries A.D.) and in Ajina-Tepeh (Southern Tajikistan, seventh century A.D.). Written evidence of direct links with India have also been found in Central Asia—Buddhist manuscripts written on birch-bark and palm leaves.

In the first centuries A.D. trade links between India and China grew apace; these were effected by way of the Great Silk Route and also by sea. Indian embassies and Buddhist missions were sent to China. In the third century A.D. large Buddhist monasteries appeared in China, and translations of Buddhist writings into Chinese were also made.

During the same period Indian colonies were being set up in Central Asia; there is ample evidence of this in documents surviving in Kharoṣṭhi script.

Links between India and Sri Lanka were established immediately after the first Indo-Aryan settlers came to the island. Under the Mauryan kings, when Buddhism first began to spread to the island, cultural ties became much closer. Indian culture exerted a strong influence over Singhalese literature, architecture and religion. At a very early stage India began trading with many countries of South-East Asia, and later Indian settlements appeared in some of these. The settlers brought with them the Sanskrit language and also many achievements of Indian culture. In the early centuries A.D. Indian communities also appeared in Indonesia.

At the time of the Harappan civilisation trade and cultural links were established with the Sumerians. Later the Indians engaged in overseas trade with Arabia and Africa and consolidated links with countries bordering the Mediterranean, including Egypt.

A new era in relations between India and the West began after Alexander the Great's campaign, when the Greeks acquainted themselves at first hand with India, its peoples and traditions. During the Kushana period ties between India and Rome grew stronger; Indian embassies bearing rich gifts were sent to Rome and Romans set up trading stations in Southern India.

The influence of ancient Greece and Rome made itself felt particularly clearly when Indo-Greek states were being set up in North-Western India, and then later in the Kushana period. It was reflected in the art of the period (Gandhara sculpture), in science and philosophy. Certain Indian astronomical treatises dating from the early centuries A.D. indicate that Indian scholars were acquainted with the work of Alexandrian astronomers; one of the *siddhantas* (astronomical treatises) came to be known as the *Romaka-siddhanta* (the Roman *siddhanta*).

Not long ago the manuscript of an astrological poem *Yavana-Jataka* (Greek Tale) was unearthed: it was compiled in the third

century on the basis of an older text translated from the Greek original. This find points clearly to the familiarity of Indian scholars with the achievements of classical scholars.

Despite these contacts with ancient Greece and Rome the influence of these cultures on India is not substantial. This influence usually extended not farther than the higher strata of society and was confined to the North-West and the West coast. At the same time Indian cultural influences started to make themselves felt in Western science, philosophy and culture.

It is known for example that Indian medicines were used in the classical world. Some scholars contend that the influence of the ideas of the *Upanishads* can be detected in Pythagoras' work and that of his followers, and maintain that the influence of ancient Indian philosophy can also be observed in the work of the neo-Platonists, etc.

However it is important to stress another angle, the analogous development of philosophical knowledge in both centres of ancient civilisation. Many crucial questions concerning the universe, man and Nature were posed and solved in similar ways by both Indian and classical thinkers. This phenomenon points to the underlying pattern of cultural advance shaped by the processes of historical development in the ancient period. While maintaining and consolidating close trade and cultural links with foreign lands over many centuries, India preserved its own distinctive culture, philosophy, traditions, social and political conventions.

The traditions of ancient Indian civilisation exerted an enormous influence on the subsequent development of Indian society and that of culture as a whole. The contribution made by ancient India to the rich heritage of world civilisation is truly immense.



# India in the Middle Ages

K. Antonova







## INDIA BETWEEN THE SIXTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES

### Indian Feudalism

Most Soviet Indologists regard the period from the seventh to the eighteenth century as the age of Indian history dominated by feudalism. This assertion is questioned by a number of scholars in view of the fact that the socio-economic order of medieval India differed from that of medieval Europe, that had originally come to be known as feudalism. In India the hierarchical structure of the ruling class was weakly developed, and at certain periods was lacking altogether. Landowners, as a rule, did not run their estates. Unpaid forced labour (*begar*) was used for the most part only for the construction of fortresses, irrigation systems, etc. Rent was usually exacted from the peasants in the form of a fixed state tax.

Rulers granted their subjects conditional ownership of the land, i.e., only the revenue from the land not the land itself. They expected in return a specific amount of state taxes. Those who were given land on the basis of conditional ownership collected taxes-cum-rent using them for their own purposes, but were obliged to maintain a specified number of troops, which taken together constituted the ruler's army. Usually neither land grants nor titles were inherited. There was also no serfdom in India, i.e., the peasant did not depend judicially on the feudal landowner. Landowners administered justice and meted out punishment only in connection with the collection of taxes. Instead of social estate barriers there existed caste barriers. The absence of inherited land holdings, titles and social estates at certain periods in Indian history made it easier for capable men of humble station to rise up in the world as military commanders.

One of the specific factors distinguishing the Indian form of feudalism from the European variety was the predominance of state-owned land.

Yet at the same time there were important resemblances between the social orders of medieval Europe and India. In both the economy was based on the manual labour of small peasants and artisans, who owned their implements of production and who secured their livelihood via production at subsistence level. Society was based on the exploitation of these groups by means of the collection of rent (or tax-cum-rent), mainly by means of coercion that was not economic in

character. This explains why the term feudalism is used with reference to India although it must be emphasised that certain of its features were quite distinct from the European model.

One of the questions discussed in detail by Soviet historians is the state ownership of land in India. The state ownership of land had not been defined in any Indian juridical sources, but the rent exacted from the land took the form of a state tax. In medieval India, it should be remembered, the word *land* was used to denote two quite different things. For the cultivator it meant a specific field which he worked, and rights over which he retained, even if he did not make use of it for a considerable period; it was land that he could bequeath, sell or donate as long as certain traditional rules of village communities were observed. For such a piece of land he was obliged to pay the fixed tax-cum-rent to the state or to whatever person a ruler might transfer his right to collect taxes.

For the feudal lord on the other hand, or for the feudal state, *land* meant territory from whose inhabitants a set amount of taxes were to be collected. The ruler granted conditionally only some territory from which a certain amount of taxes was to be collected; later the officials decided what district or districts should be comprised within this grant. In the stage of developed feudalism the vast majority of these estates were conditional: they could not be bequeathed, alienated or sublet to less wealthy landowners. The feudal lords did not intervene with the way in which the peasant worked the land. However since taxes were only exacted from cultivated land, the feudal lords would go out of their way to extend the area of land under the plough, laying down that peasants should enjoy tax privileges for a number of years, if they brought fallow or virgin land under cultivation, or by rewarding those who sowed intensive, high-yield crops.

State ownership of land meant that the state fixed the amount of land revenue and the manner of its collection. This land tax was of the same size and character as the feudal rent; the land tax was either collected by state officials in person or this right was given to the feudal lords themselves. As a result various social groups in medieval India had their own distinctive concept of land and rights to landed property. It should however be borne in mind that while state ownership was the predominant form, there was also another smaller portion of landed property belonging to hereditary independent or vassal landowners (they came to be known as the *zamindars* under the Moguls), who themselves laid down the size of the rents they would demand from their cultivators and at times supervised their own farms with the help of their dependent cultivators or farm servants.

The basic unit of the agricultural labour force was the family. References are made to the existence of village communities with village councils composed of their most prominent members. In Northern India these communities seem to have incorporated one or

several villages linked together by some degree of common kinship with the founder of the settlement in question or with the tribe of conquerors that had settled in the area. In Southern India until the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries these communities were large, consisting of tens, hundreds or even thousands of villages, and although in the ninth and tenth centuries that kind of big community ceased to be an integrated economic unit, it still remained an important political force. In some of the communities land was redistributed at periodic intervals, while in others the land under cultivation was divided between families on a permanent basis. It would seem that the village community as a whole had control of the fallow land, assigned to individual members their share of the land revenue, and probably supported a certain number of servants and artisans. It is probable that the village communities in Southern India were more prosperous and powerful than those in the north of the country. At any rate their decisions and instructions were more frequently recorded on stone and other durable materials. In all Indian communities the more prominent individuals (usually the headman and the scribe) occupied a privileged position. Important decisions seem to have been taken at village councils, but gradually more and more power within the community came to be concentrated in the hands of the head of the village and the scribe. The upper strata of the village community often actually turned into petty feudal lords and their land was worked by those dependent upon them.

### **Early Feudal Period**

In ancient times certain features of feudal exploitation were already to be found in India: on the one hand land was mostly cultivated not by slaves but by bond labourers, while grants of land were received in return for "services to the state" on the other. In the sixth and seventh centuries there was a marked increase in the number of small copper plates used to record such grants of land. They enable the historian to trace the development of feudal relations. These copper plates list the ever increasing number of taxes collected from the population: the grantees were either exempt from their payment or were entitled to collect them for their own use. More and more frequently there appears the formula of immunity—prohibiting *chata* and *bhata* (evidently, officials and military detachments) from entering granted lands. Feudal landowners became entitled to administer justice, and the peasants started to become increasingly dependent on their masters. Frequently the grand feudal lords, who to judge by their titles acted as local governors, gave away parts of their lands in grants "for services rendered" without seeking the sanction of their ruler. Sometimes grants of land were made in the name of the ruler, but "at the request" of the less powerful feudal lord.

As regards social and political developments, India did not undergo such major upheavals as did Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. Foreign trade with the Mediterranean countries gradually decreased, but Indian wares were still exported on a wide scale to Eastern countries from Egypt to China. India exported in the main cotton fabrics and other articles made by her craftsmen, as well as spices, ivory, precious stones and valuable sorts of timber. Imports included silk, gold, luxury articles, certain types of fabric differing in ornament and colours from Indian materials, and also horses that were imported in large numbers since the Indian climate and vegetation were ill-suited for horse breeding.

From the first century A.D. onwards settlements of Indian merchants appeared in many countries of the Far East, in particular in what are now Malaya, Indonesia and Indochina. There were many sea-port towns along the entire coast of India: Bharukachchha (modern Broach), Suratha (modern Surat), Shurparaka (modern Sopara), Urayur, Madurai, Kanchipuram, etc. There were also large towns on the main caravan routes: Takshashila, Shakala (Sialkot), Purushapura (Peshawar)—in the Punjab Kanyakubja (Kanauj), Sthanesh-vara (Thaneswar) in Northern India; Ujjain in Central India; Vatapi, Tagara, Paithan, to name but three, in Southern India. These towns were large trading and manufacturing centres, although many of their inhabitants were engaged in agriculture; they kept herds and worked fields within the confines of the towns. The merchants organised influential guilds, which played a prominent role in the economic, and to a lesser extent, political life of the country. To judge by the source materials available, the merchants were more wealthy and influential than artisans, often acquired land by purchase and made rich gifts to the temples. In short, urban life did not fall into decline during the early medieval period.

Neither did internal trade decrease during this period. The most convenient trade artery within India was provided by the Ganges and its tributaries. Trade articles were taken south from Bengal on coastal trading vessels, or by trading caravans.

There were also trade routes across the Deccan, for the most part along large rivers; this facilitated transportation of merchandise from the large ports into the interior. However trade within the country was not as well developed as foreign trade.

#### **THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF INDIA FROM THE SIXTH TO THE TWELFTH CENTURY**

As a result of her uninterrupted trade links and the growth of her ports, the various regions of India did not become isolated from one another as was the case in Europe at the beginning of the Middle Ages: nor did India experience such a cultural decline at this period.

However in India as well the consolidation of feudal relations impeded the existence of large state unions. Instead the picture was one of rivalry and fierce strife between petty feudal rulers leading to political fragmentation. In this situation the Gupta empire later came to be upheld as the "golden age of India".

That empire which had started to weaken at the end of the fifth century, finally collapsed after numerous invasions by the Hun tribes, although in Magadha itself the Gupta dynasty remained in power until the end of the seventh century. As late as 510 A.D. the Hun king Toramana was defeated by Bhanu Gupta, the last Gupta ruler about whom reliable information is available. However already in about 530 A.D. the Huns under Mihirakula were ruling over not only North-Western India but also Malwa and the Yamuna-Ganges valley as far as present-day Gwalior. Mihirakula appears to have been an extremely cruel conqueror. The Indian rulers of the North succeeded in joining forces and dealing him a major defeat in about 533 A.D.

The tribes that came to India during the Hun invasion and settled there made a deep imprint upon the country's history. Some of these settled and intermixed with the inhabitants of North-Western India. Together with these tribes there also came the Gurjaras, who settled in the Punjab, Sind, and Rajputana: some of them later penetrated Malwa and that part of the country which came to be known after them—Gujarat. Close contacts and intermarriage between both the Huns and the Gurjaras and the local population gave rise to the ethnic group which later came to be known as the Rajputs. (The term Rajput has several meanings: it is used to designate a people, various tribes and a caste.)

As early as the seventh century, feudal relations started to take root in this part of the country. In the eighth century the Rajputs penetrated the rich areas of the Ganges valley and Central India. For many centuries of Indian history the Rajputs constituted a close-knit ethnic group. The feudal relations which took root in their territories differed in certain respects from those found elsewhere. The feudal hierarchy was more intricate and traditions of vassalage more deep-rooted.

The largest states in Northern India at the end of the sixth century were Gauda (North and West Bengal), the state of the Maukharis (the Doab and the middle reaches of the Ganges) with its capital in Kanauj, and that of the Pushyabhutis (the upper Doab, the region around present-day Delhi and Sirhind with its capital at Sthaneshvara). These three states were involved in constant feuds with one another. First Shashanka (who reigned from the end of the sixth century to the third decade of the seventh), the ruler of Gauda, conquered Magadha and all the territories to the west as far as Prayaga, and to the east he annexed lands (that form the modern state of Orissa) stretching as far as the Mahendragiri Mountains. He also formed an alliance with the ruler of Malwa against the Maukharis. The latter gained the support of

the ruler of the Pushyabhutis, but were defeated in battle. Harshavardhana, or Harsha, the younger brother of the Pushyabhuti ruler, came to the throne.

According to tradition, Harsha had mustered an impressive army consisting of twenty thousand horsemen, fifty thousand foot soldiers and five thousand elephants. In the course of six years, when according to the chronicler Bana, "while the elephants were not unharnessed nor the soldiers unhelmeted", Harsha succeeded in conquering virtually the whole of Northern India. His attempt to invade the Deccan, however, seems to have ended in defeat on the banks of the river Narmada at the hands of Pulakeshin II, the ruler of the Western Chalukyas. Yet Pulakeshin made no further attempts to march northwards. After Shashanka's death Harsha seized Magadha and Bengal. He devoted the latter years of his life to improving the administration and economy of the conquered territories.

Harsha's kingdom was the last state incorporating a major part of the sub-continent in a large empire until the beginning of the thirteenth century. However the links between the various parts of the empire were weaker than at the time of the Guptas. Only a small part of the empire was directly subordinated to the centre, the majority of it was administered by vassal princes, who enjoyed considerable power in relation to questions of internal politics. Furthermore, the borders of the empire did not extend beyond Northern India and parts of Malwa and Rajputana remained independent.

Harsha's exploits were preserved for posterity thanks mainly to the panegyric chronicle *Harshacharita* written by Bana, and also the account written by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Hsuan Tsang, who visited his realm. According to Bana, the land tax in Harsha's domains was one-sixth of the harvest. A number of other internal tariffs and market dues also helped to swell the state coffers.

Although Harsha's ancestors had been Shaivites, Harsha himself became a Buddhist. He devoted considerable energy and resources to the construction of Buddhist monasteries. During his reign the large Buddhist monastery-university at Nalanda (near modern Patna), where thousands of students were maintained and given instruction, won a reputation that spread far beyond the borders of India. The buildings at Nalanda counted many storeys, the academic and living premises taken together covered an enormous territory. However the influence of Buddhism at that time was clearly on the wane and the Brahman divinities Shiva, Vishnu and Surya (the Sun-god) commanded more popularity.

Harsha's empire existed for close on thirty years. After his death the empire disintegrated and for several centuries afterwards India consisted of a large number of states; some of these were large but none of them incorporated a major part of the sub-continent as had been the case with the Mauryan and Gupta empires. These states were continually warring with one another, concluding alliances of short

duration before embarking on hostilities once more. The kaleidoscopic, constantly changing picture provided by the events of this time is extremely difficult to describe. It is best to dwell briefly on just the best known names and events.

In Southern India the main states that were continually warring with each other were those of the Chalukyas (from Vatapi), who came into prominence after their ruler Pulakeshin II secured victories over Harsha, the Pallavas and the Pandyas. Pulakeshin assumed the title of emperor, and his brothers who were ruling in Gujarat and the Eastern Deccan recognised his suzerainty. However, the Chalukyas were then attacked by the Pallavas (whose capital was at Kanchipuram) and the Pandyas (with their centre in Madura). The Pandyas were able gradually to set up a large sea fleet and this enabled them at times even to gain control over Ceylon. In 640 A.D. the Pallavas dealt the Chalukyas a crushing defeat and Pulakeshin II was killed while his capital was under siege. However Pulakeshin's successors retained intact the larger part of his realm and on several occasions marched southwards and succeeded in annexing new territories.

The Pallavas exerted a considerable influence on the culture of India: in Mahabalipuram, on the coast, a large number of temples were cut out of the rock and the style of architecture used there incorporating groups of sculptured figures and bas-reliefs over almost the whole of the sacred building was later to spread right across the Deccan. It also left its mark on artistic styles in South-East Asia, since the Pallava state engaged in overseas trade on a wide scale; in what are now Indonesia and Cambodia there were at that time large settlements of traders from Southern India. The state of the Western Chalukyas continued to exist up until the middle of the eighth century, when the ruler of the Chalukyas, Kirtivarman II was defeated by the Rashtrakutas from Maharashtra. Then for almost two centuries the Rashtrakutas dominated the Deccan. They left a lasting monument to their rule in the famous Kailasa temple hewn out of the rock at Ellora (not far from modern Aurangabad).

During their heyday the Rashtrakutas made several incursions into Northern India. The main opponents they encountered were the Palas from Bihar and Bengal, and the Gurjara-Pratiharas, whose capital was in Kanauj. The conflict between these three states raged mainly over the fertile Doab valley, where the Ganges and the Yamuna flow. In the north of India at that time there were also several petty princedoms such as those of the Chandellas, who built the world-famous temples at Khajuraho, and the Tomaras, who set up their capital at Dhillika (modern Delhi).

In the tenth century all three of these powers in Northern India were in decline. The smaller vassal princedoms were growing in strength, expanding their territory and gradually ousting their former rulers. In the lands of the Gurjara-Pratiharas for example there emerged independent states of the Paramaras, Chandellas, Guhilas,

Chauhans (Chahamanas) and Chalukyas (Solanki). The realm of the Palas broke up into a number of small territories, the most powerful among which was the Sena principedom. The Chauhans (or Chahamanas) ruled in Eastern and Central Rajasthan and part of Gujarat; the Paramaras, who made several incursions into Rajasthan, Gujarat and the Deccan, were based in Malwa. However by the middle of the eleventh century the Paramara state had weakened. Bundelkhand became the centre of the Chandella state, but its possessions also included part of the Doab, Varanasi and a small part of Bihar. In Central India the principedom of the Kalachuris (Haihayas), which had previously been a vassal province of the Rashtrakutas, now became independent, and continued its independent existence until the thirteenth century. The dynasty of the Chalukyas (Solanki) became firmly established in Northern Gujarat.

Hostilities between the Pallavas and the Pandyas undermined the power of both states. The Tamil dynasty of the Cholas, which ruled over a small region around Uraiyur, came to the forefront. In the battle of the year 893 A.D. the Cholas inflicted a decisive defeat on the Pallavas, then in 915 they routed the Pandyas and were able to unite under their rule almost the whole of what is now known as the Tamil-nad. Their battles against the Cholas and the constant efforts required to maintain their domination of Northern India weakened the Rashtrakutas and in 973 they were overthrown by Taila II, who set up the state of the Later Chalukyas. The fall of the mighty Rashtrakuta dynasty enabled the Cholas to dominate Southern India for the next two hundred years. The Cholas were in the ascendant in the eleventh century. During the reign of Rajaraja I (985-1015) and Rajendra I (1015-1044) the Cholas were engaged in prolonged hostilities with the Eastern Chalukyas from Vengi, whom they finally reduced to vassal status but were unable in the end to completely subjugate. However the Cholas did, on the other hand, seize Ceylon, where they were able to establish themselves firmly and for a long period. Indeed, part of the present-day population of Sri Lanka is Tamil in origin. The Cholas were engaged in war with the state of the Shrivijayas, the centre of which was in Sumatra and which also controlled part of Java and the Malacca peninsula. In 1025 the Cholas seized part of the territory of the Shrivijayas, only to be driven out from them later on. In India itself the Cholas' state embraced the territory of modern Mysore and Kerala. The Cholas inflicted several defeats on the Chalukyas from Kalyani and undertook a lengthy campaign in Orissa and Bengal during which, legends have it, they penetrated as far as the Ganges.

Possessed, as they were, of a powerful army and well-equipped fleet and thanks to their trade links with the Shrivijayas and the countries bordering on the Arabian Sea, the Cholas prospered and became extremely rich. They built magnificent temples (such as the one at Chidambaram). Numerous bronze statuettes of the gods were fashioned. In the year 1070 the Chola dynasty and that of the Eastern



Chalukyas from Vengi united. By the beginning of the twelfth century the Chola state incorporated almost the whole of Southern India, south of the Krishna and the Tungabhadra rivers, and it stretched eastwards as far as the Godavari River. However the process of feudalisation eventually brought about the disintegration of the Chola empire. Independent princedoms emerged in the borderlands of that state, which, although officially under Chola jurisdiction, nevertheless completely ignored the central government and waged war and concluded treaties among themselves at will. Gradually in Southern India there came into prominence such peoples as the Hoyasalas from Dwarasamudra, the Yadavas from Devagiri, the Kakatiyas from Warangal and the Pandyas who had seized power in the southern part of the Tamil-nad. At the end of the twelfth century the Cholas were only in control of an insignificant princedom in the Tanjore area.

The Yadavas achieved their greatest glory during the reign of Singhana (1200-1247). Their state embraced all the Deccan between the Krishna and the Nerbada rivers.

Northern India was plagued by still greater fragmentation; here fierce strife raged between the states of the Chauhans (whose capital was in Ajmer and at times in Delhi) and the Gahadavalas (incorporating modern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar). However these states later were not able to withstand attacks by the armies from Khurasan. In the twelfth century there remained but one sizeable state in Northern India, that of the Senas in Bengal.

From the eleventh century India began to be subjected to incursions by Moslems from the north. At the close of the twelfth century they began to annex large Indian territories; this gave rise to a completely new situation in India.

#### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEUDAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SIXTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES**

While a kaleidoscopic series of states and rulers appeared on the political stage, and as wars were being waged, a long and gradual process of feudalisation was at work in the socio-economic life of Indian society. It was proceeding at two levels. On the one hand more and more lands that brought in rent were being distributed as grants. The grantees came to enjoy more and more rights both in relation to the central government, and also in relation to the inhabitants dependent on them. On the other hand within the village community itself the village officials, particularly the headman, frequently gained greater powers among the villagers; their functions with regard to the division of the land tax within their village acquired increased importance. This meant that whereas before their main concern had

been to protect the interests of the village community, now all-important became their role as rural administrators belonging to the state apparatus. Through their control of important community affairs and the way the village's uncultivated land was used, through their acquisition of land for themselves and the use they made of the free services of other villagers, some of the headmen gradually became in fact petty feudal landowners; the status they had acquired in practical terms would later be legalised through government decrees. However this emergence of new feudal landowners from the ranks of the cultivators is outlined in only the scantiest terms in historical documents.

The majority of inscriptions dating from this period (the sixth to the twelfth century) record land grants made to Brahmins in order to enhance the religious merit of the ruler. These were grants "in perpetuity" and they were recorded on durable materials, usually copper plates. However the few grants that were made to secular citizens and were recorded not on perishable palm leaves (the customary material for writing in Southern India) but in copper resemble the grants made to Brahmins, although it is possible that there also existed assignments for terms of service.

As a rule, and in particular in Bengal, these grants were made by the feudal rulers. However, in Northern India, in the empire of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, such grants were often made by vassals whose possessions were situated in the borderlands, either with the agreement of the central organs of administration or even without their knowledge at all. These gifts became particularly frequent after the decline of large states in the tenth century.

The titles of various men of power listed in inscriptions—those of sovereigns, regional and district governors, etc.—point to the existence of a developed feudal administration network, especially in Bengal. In the north there were considerably fewer administrative posts: it would appear that the vassals enjoyed more independence there.

Those who were granted or given land came gradually to acquire administrative and judicial immunity. They were entitled to judge the people inhabiting their lands in connection with the "ten offences" recognised by the courts of the time; often state officials were prohibited from entering the territory of such estates. This meant that the cultivators became more dependent on the grantees. The state usually reserved for itself the right to administer justice only in cases of major offences, subject to capital punishment. On occasions, and in particular from the twelfth century onwards, the owners of feudal estates were themselves in charge of the distribution of village community rental.

In the inscriptions of the times there are also references to taxes from which grantees were exempted. Gradually the list of taxes grew and grew, in particular by the tenth century. Among the taxes listed

are those on marriages, childlessness, on the celebration of festivals or family occasions in the house of the landowner; also mentioned are collections to be paid for the delivery of royal decrees, or the board and lodging of officials visiting the village, fines decreed by the courts, tariffs, etc. Numerous attempts were made to "put in order" this complicated state of affairs, i.e., to combine these requisitions in one basic tax. Sooner or later however new taxes were added and the situation would repeat itself. This reflected the growing financial oppression to which the people were being subjected and the increasingly dependent position of the villagers. Oppressed by heavy land revenue demands the village community members were in practical terms losing their personal freedom.

As the degree of taxation increased so too did the varieties of forced labour, which constituted a type of *corvée*. It was the duty of the peasants to see to the maintenance and upkeep of bridges and roads, attend to the needs of officials who might visit their village, and take part in various types of building work. It is not however known whether or not they were required to work on the field of the owner of the granted land. All that is mentioned in the inscriptions is that the holder of such land is entitled to "cultivate the land or have it cultivated", but it is not clear whether this implied *corvée* or the introduction of share-cropping. There is however no doubt that the use of villagers' forced labour was widespread.

The richest of the feudal lords (with the exception of actual rulers) were of course the "collective owners": the Hindu temples and the monasteries. At that period there was a difference between the grants made to religious institutions and those made to priests and monks, when lands, villages or parts of villages could be donated both to individual Brahmins or groups of Brahmins, who would then share out the rents between themselves. All questions relating to the administration of such Brahmin villages were resolved by the council of Brahmins or the *sabha*. This council also decided questions connected with the allocation of rents, usually on a once-and-for-all basis.

The Brahmin *sabha* differed from the village community in that it was a council consisting of landowners only, although occasionally land grants to Brahmins were divided up so many times amongst descendants that the individual plots were no longer distinguishable in size from those of the villagers. The temples did not divide up their possessions; on the contrary they added to them, receiving all manner of donations from pious rulers, feudal lords and village communities, as well as through land purchases and mortgages, etc. Lands donated to temples were, as a rule, exempt from taxation and enjoyed various forms of immunity.

Initially, to judge by existing inscriptions, only uncultivated lands were donated. In order to donate land to a temple a ruler or feudal lord was obliged first of all to buy it, as temple land had to be free of

revenue obligations. In medieval India land, in particular that which had not yet been cultivated, was often bought and sold, although in each case it was necessary to obtain the sanction of the village community or any other group to which it belonged. After the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries restrictions pertaining to the purchase and sale of land were increased. It is possible that on the granted fallow land temples set up their own estates, using the labour of monks, and also that of slaves, share-croppers and hired labourers. From the sixth-eighth centuries onwards it became common practice for temples to receive donations of whole villages, whose inhabitants worked the land for the priests or monks. It is known for a fact that in the seventh and eighth centuries the temples collected rent in kind. Apart from food products the cultivators were obliged to supply the temples with all essentials for the observance of religious ceremonies such as oil, incense, garlands of flowers, cloth for ceremonial garments.

The temple estates were usually managed by a council consisting of Brahmans and headmen of other cultivators' or merchant and artisan castes. There was a large body of staff at the temple including scribes, craftsmen, singers, musicians, dancers, etc. The temple estates in Southern India were particularly extensive and well organised.

Although lands were donated to temples "for as long as the Sun and Moon exist" and in the inscriptions a curse was laid on those who might encroach upon that land, it is clear from historical records that on frequent occasions, particularly in troubled times, as one dynasty would be ousted by another or when the local population might be subjected to invasion by foreign conquerors, not only the estates of feudal lords but also those belonging to Brahman communities and temples were confiscated by the state. This explains the constant changes at that period between the proportion of land owned by the state and that owned by individual feudal lords.

However, despite all this, the members of village communities in India maintained their rights not only to personal freedom but also certain other rights and privileges. Grants of land (and this applied particularly to Bengal) were made in the presence of the whole of the local population, including even those from the most humble castes. In the texts of the relevant grants special mention was made of the *mahattaras*, i.e., the "respected members" of the community, who appear to have included the headmen and scribes.

In a grant from Southern Maharashtra there is reference to a plot of land exempt from taxation that belonged to the village headman. The headmen, as is clear from literary works written in the Middle Ages, often used their power to extort bribes, demanding from fellow-villagers respect and gifts; they were considerably richer than the other members of the village community and their influence often extended beyond the confines of the village circle. One of the dynasties, the Rashtrakutas, was descended, to judge by the name,

from precisely this stratum of the villagers. On assuming power, the Rashtrakutas made their title based on position in the village community ("rural elite") into the name of a dynasty, showing no sign of shame at their rural origins.

In the Middle Ages the village community was a powerful organisation which had not only a social and economic role to play but also a political one, particularly in Southern India. In the north the village communities appear to have been smaller in size and less influential, but there too the communities often incorporated a number of villages (*gramas*) or smaller units (*konas*, *pattakas*, etc.). Each village community had a council consisting of "prominent members", was in charge of the land and resolved all local disputes and lawsuits. In Southern India the village community could embrace the territory of a whole district (or *nadu*). In Carnatic geographical names followed by a number were used to denote large village communities, such as Belvola 300 or Chirapi 12. Scholars do not yet agree what these numbers might signify, but most probably they indicate the number of farms incorporated within a given community's organisation, or the number of local village councils it embraced.

These communities arranged their own administration and defence, mutual assistance amongst the peasants, building of irrigation facilities and participated in the hostilities between the local feudal lords. They inscribed their decrees on stone plates that were frequently enclosed within the walls of temples. Money for this activity was collected in the form of community dues, which sometimes were no less in amount than revenue taxes. Gradually, as the process of feudalisation progressed, these large communities began to lose their autonomy and develop into ordinary administrative units, which came gradually under the control of officials appointed by the central authorities. The final disintegration of the large village communities into small units embracing no more than one or two villages would appear to have taken place in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In these village communities of medieval India the lands under cultivation were divided between the peasants. In documents relating to Southern India references are to be found, from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onwards, to redivision of land designed to distribute more fairly among the peasants the more fertile plots and those situated on more convenient terrain. However, these redivisions were by no means the rule and they did not affect the peasant's right of ownership to his share of the village community land, which he could also alienate. A member of the village community was a landowner and could dispose of his fields: he could bequeath them and was also entitled to sell or purchase land, although the alienation of land from the village community could only take place under the latter's control. Fallow lands belonged to the community as a whole and they were not subject to land tax. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries rural

craftsmen were set apart from the mass of the rural population and maintained by the community. Until that period there was simply no mention of the composition of the village community in documentary material. Since changes within the village community did not affect its position as a revenue-paying territory, the feudal lords did not interfere in village life and affairs.

In medieval India there existed, as it were, three worlds and three different ways of life: the first was the entourage of the feudal lord or the temple, the second was the village community and the third was the town.

Right up until the end of the thirteenth and even during the fourteenth century the towns, and particularly the seaport towns of Southern India, enjoyed far-reaching autonomy. The affairs of these towns were controlled by town assemblies, whose members included the heads of the richer and more influential castes, usually those of the traders and less frequently those of the craftsmen (such as the copper workers and oil-pressers). The town assembly not only concerned itself with the maintenance of law and order and gave judgement in cases of litigation, but it also collected trading dues and taxes from the artisans, and independently decided the amount of these dues or taxes. The town administration could, on its own initiative, make grants to the temples for religious ceremonies and for charitable purposes not only from the income it received, thanks to the collection of trading dues, or taxes on houses of artisans, but also donate plots of land belonging to the town that were not, to use the words of contemporary inscriptions, "used for building sites". The town assemblies were inter-caste organisations. To a large extent they were autonomous.

At the same time there also existed merchant guilds that embraced a whole trading area. An example of these is provided by the merchant guild in Aihole, whose influence spread to many areas of Southern India, to the trading centres of Indian merchants in South-East Asia, although the nucleus of the guild—its council of five hundred *swami*—was in the town of Aihole in Southern India. Another similar organisation was the *manigramam* with its centre in present-day Kerala. Its sphere of influence embraced not only India, but also Egypt, Arabia and South-East Asia. Members of the *komati* merchant guild that was centred in Penugonda constituted the major part of the assemblies in eighteen towns. There also existed other similar organisations.

It would be wrong to assume that the Indian towns of that period were the embryo of new, capitalist relations. The broad autonomy of the towns served to indicate the fact that the feudal lords were as yet unable to assert their control over the economy and social life of the country. References can be found to the presence in the towns of representatives of the state administration, who in certain cases took the final decisions. Gradually, as the power of the feudal state

developed, the towns lost their autonomy. Revenues were collected by state officials, who also fixed their amount. Revenues from petty shops and artisan districts in towns were donated to feudal lords. The town assemblies ceased to exist, and the merchant guilds lost their political influence. So that finally, after the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth century, rulers began to grant whole towns to feudal lords. From the fourteenth century onwards, town self-administration had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist. The feudal lords became autocrats in the towns to the same extent as they had been in the villages. From then on the merchants, despite their wealth, were dependent upon the arbitrary whims of the feudal lords: they were harassed and sometimes even imprisoned if they did not provide the large sums of money which one or another potentate might require.

The social organisation of Indian society at that time was based on the caste system. The classification of society as consisting of four *varnas* (or social estates) had been retained since ancient times. Each *varna* was subdivided into a large number of different castes. The majority of merchant and artisan castes had come into being as a result of the division of labour, while certain others could be traced back to the movement of various groups to new localities, where their customs and beliefs had set them apart from the majority of the local population. A number of castes were essentially distinct tribes that had been incorporated into the caste system with traditional occupations and social functions. Each of the castes was seen as possessing a specific degree of "purity" or "impurity" and a specific position in relation to other castes within the complex hierarchy.

The implications intrinsic to the terms denoting the various *varnas* had also changed. The Brahmins were not only priests: more and more of their number had become landowners, officials and military commanders. In Northern India the Rajputs now started to lay claim to the title *kshatriya*. Their traditional occupation was now not only warfare but farming as well, although it was held that it was beneath the dignity of a Rajput to hold a plough, and the tilling of the land would be delegated to their servants and dependents. In Southern India *kshatriya* castes had practically not evolved. Representatives of the warrior and farming castes were regarded as *shudras* there. The actual status of this *varna* was enhanced: *shudras* became full-fledged members of the village communities and in the early centuries A.D. this also applied to certain sections of the artisans. Merchants and rich artisans began to claim *vaishya* status.

The caste system generally corresponded to the class divisions in society and served to sanctify it. Influential and rich groups occupied the highest echelons of the caste hierarchy, while the lowest socio-economic groups of the population belonged to the lower castes. At the same time, if certain individuals or families achieved higher social status—became, for instance, big landowners, successful military commanders or even rulers, then high caste origin, from

*kshatriya* or equally elevated castes, would be ascribed to them, or at least to their descendants. Whole groups of *shudras* engaged in trading eventually achieved *vaishya* status. Even the untouchables were able sometimes to raise themselves up to *shudra* status, or at least lay claim to higher caste origins. At the same time it was also possible to descend the caste ladder.

This meant that the caste system facilitated above all the preservation of the existing social system, but in cases of change was also able to adapt itself to new circumstances. At that period the caste structure was not the ossified institution it was to become later.

#### INDIAN CULTURE BETWEEN THE SIXTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES

In the Middle Ages man's world outlook manifested itself in his religious beliefs. In India religion played a very important role. The period in question was marked by a decline of Buddhism and the onset of an age predominated by Hinduism. Scholars fail to agree as to the reasons behind this phenomenon. Some hold that Buddhism in India was linked with the domination of the *kshatriyas*, who stood at the head of large empires. Others consider that Buddhism, given its widely ramified system of monasteries and pilgrims, was not in a position to adapt itself to the more enclosed economic structure of the early medieval period. At any rate the last resurgence of Buddhism in the form of the Mahayana teaching took place in Harsha's empire, when the university at Nalanda attracted thousands of students from various Buddhist countries. Buddhism was also championed by the Pala dynasty in Bengal. A considerable section of the population there adhered to Buddhist beliefs as late as the twelfth century. In the south of India the decline of Buddhism was remarked upon as early as the eighth century.

This change in religion did not lead to a different mode of life. In Hinduism there is a large number of sects and trends, which differ as regards both the god selected from the extensive Hindu pantheon that the faithful might venerate, as well as the religious rites and customs observed. However certain customs and ideas are common to all Hindus. They attach great importance to the concept of virtue or duty (*Dharma*), that consists in the steadfast and unswerving execution of caste obligations. Thus for the higher castes *Dharma* involves just administration or courageous behaviour on the battlefield, and for the lower ones conscientious execution of their traditional occupation and respect to be shown to persons of elevated origin. Hinduism instils the idea that the division of society into castes has been predestined, that all castes are essential and that the position of each individual in the caste structure has been determined by his behaviour in the life that preceded his current one. Man's soul does not die but after the death of his body it transmigrates to another being: if a man has led a



virtuous life, then after his rebirth his caste status will have been enhanced. If on the other hand he has led a corrupt life, then he might be reborn as an untouchable or even as some loathsome animal. Hence everything appears just, for even if a good man suffers all kinds of misfortune, this is seen as punishment for misdemeanours in a past existence.

Common to all Hindus was the concept of *ahimsa*, namely the idea that one should avoid inflicting harm on any living creature, and also the homage paid to a number of animals—in particular the cow that is worshipped by all Hindus. The rituals performed at various occasions through man's life, from the cradle to the grave, were also a shared tradition even though the details of these rituals might vary. All Hindus had to make sacrifices—some, animal sacrifices but mostly just offerings of flowers and incense; all were called upon to make offerings within their particular means to the Brahmans and the temples, and all revered as holy men various hermits, ascetics, wandering preachers, etc. All Hindus also viewed as obligatory the performance of caste rituals and the observance of caste prohibitions, indeed these were seen as no less important than the worship of the divinities.

The most popular objects of worship were the gods Vishnu and Shiva. Linked with the cult of Shiva is the worship of his spouse, known in various parts of the country as Kali, Uma, Parvati, Shakti. Kali was represented as a fierce goddess demanding bloody sacrifices, while Uma and Parvati were seen as a tender mother. It is clear that the traditions of many different cults were drawn together and fused in this image.

The worship of Shakti evolved. Shakti was also perceived of as the emanation of the might of Shiva and the veneration of Shakti was associated with Tantrism—a Hindu movement that was quite separate from the other currents, and which had its own sacred writings, the *Tantras*, and with its own ways of worshipping a deity, mostly a female one. The emphasis in Tantrism is on elements of mysticism and magic, and also on rites and conduct that are prohibited by Hinduism (orgies, marriage beyond the confines of one's caste, etc.). At that period Tantrism was advocated for the most part by members of the lower castes and representatives of non-Aryan tribes and groups.

From the sixth century onwards the idea of *Bhakti* became widespread in Southern India: this concept implied an overwhelming love of god before which ritual, asceticism and Brahman orthodoxy pale in significance. In the twelfth century, Basava, the founder of the Lingayata sect (which worshipped in particular Shiva's symbol, the linga, i.e., phallus), linked together the concept of *Bhakti* with Tantrism, and repudiated such an essential principle of Hinduism as the caste system. He emphasised not so much observance of ritual as the need to love Shiva, while at the same time accepting the merit of

asceticism. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Lingayata followers of Basava openly opposed official Hinduism and Jainism.

Between the seventh and ninth centuries the Vaishnavites also came under the influence of this new concept, and later it was propagated by the Bhaktas in Bengal. Insofar as the Bhaktas (the followers of *Bhakti*) rejected the ritual aspect of Hinduism and the exclusive position of the Brahmans, the propagation of the *Bhakti* concept began to contain a note of social protest.

From the sixth to the tenth century in the coastal regions, for the most part in the ports, it was Jainism that became the mass religion. The most famous of all the Jaina temples was that at Aihole (Aivalle) built in the seventh century. In the Middle Ages a large number of other temples and statues were built. The Jainas enjoyed special influence among the Tamil population. However between the sixth and eighth centuries the Bhaktas waged a fierce struggle against Jainism and the latter began to yield its ground to Hinduism. By the fifteenth century Jainism had only succeeded in retaining some influence in Gujarat, although small Jaina communities, for the most part those of the merchants and moneylenders, remained in many Indian towns.

Despite the fact that the philosophical thought of India was closely bound up with religious concepts, in the Middle Ages it began to develop as a separate field of knowledge in its own right.

It was in that period that the six classical systems of Indian philosophy described earlier in this volume took definitive shape: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. These systems were regarded as orthodox insofar as they accepted the authority of the *Vedas*, and each of them made its own particular contribution to man's knowledge of the world and the laws of thought, although the ideas were presented in a religious cum mystical form. Apart from these official systems, there were also the Buddhist philosophical schools of the Madhyamikas and Vijnyanavadas, who rejected the reality of the world and of knowledge, and who also did not accept God himself as the creator of the world. The Madhyamika school asserted: "If God has no beginning then he himself does not exist." All they recognised as real was pure consciousness, viewed as cosmic essence. On the other hand the Charvaka sect spread a materialist teaching rejecting the existence of the soul, insofar as it is impossible to prove it exists independently of the body. For the same reason the Charvakas also rejected the existence of an absolute soul or God.

From the late eighth and the early ninth century onwards the Advaita-Vedanta school founded by Shankara (788-820) became ever more popular. This school spoke out in favour of reviving the ancient teaching of the *Upanishads*, declaring that God should be accepted as the sole reality while the world should be viewed as no more than an illusion, in which only those not endowed with knowledge believe.

The aim of "enlightened" men should be to set themselves free from illusion and be aware of their oneness with Brahman (with God). Shankara was not only a philosopher but also a religious reformer, striving to strip Hinduism of latter-day additions detracting from its original purity. He built four monasteries and introduced reform in the community of *sanyasi* ascetics.

However in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries Shankara's ideas, comprehensible only to the "chosen few", began to lose their popularity. Ramanuja (eleventh century) simplified the concepts of the Uedanta school making them accessible to the people at large. According to his theory God created the world from matter, time and soul—three substances separate from himself. In order to comprehend God there was no need to have extensive knowledge of the sacred texts; far more important was man's love for God which alone could bring him to a true understanding of God. Love for and devotion to God were not affected by the caste of the believer. In the teaching of Ramanuja God is presented not as an indifferent creator of the world, but as a creator interested in the destiny of each individual; he responds to man's prayers and can bring about changes in man's destiny. The philosophy of Ramanuja constituted the fundamental belief for many Vedanta sects.

In medieval India scientific knowledge made major advances basing itself on the foundations laid in ancient times. Spectacular success was achieved in the spheres of mathematics, astronomy and medicine, linked with the practical experience of men engaged in agriculture, construction work and healing.

In the period from the sixth to the thirteenth century literature in the local languages developed in most parts of India, although many poets were still writing in the "high" language, namely Sanskrit. Sanskrit literature was gradually becoming *recherché* and aimed mostly at court circles. A vivid example is provided by the *Ramacharita* written by Sandhyakara Nanda, a poet living at the court of the Bengali ruler, Ramapala (1077-1119). Each line of this poem has a double meaning and can be taken as relating to the epic hero Rama or the king Ramapala, and it thus equates the deeds of the poet's patron with the exploits of the epic hero. Particularly popular was the *Gita Govinda*, written in the twelfth century by the Bengali poet Jayadeva, and describing the love of Krishna for Radha, which symbolises the striving of the human soul to God. The subtle psychological detail and the vivid imagery of this poem were to exert an important influence on the development of poetry in almost all new Indian languages, and the mystical interpretation of sexual attraction later became widespread in *Bhakti* poetry.

The development of literature in the local languages found expression not only in the rendering of epic works from the Sanskrit, for example that of the *Ramayana* into Telugu by Buddha Reddi in the thirteenth century, but original literature gained ground as well.

Although it was mainly poetry that made significant advances in the Middle Ages, there also appeared prose works in Sanskrit consisting of stories linked by a common motif. Examples of these were *Kadambari* by Bana, a tale of two lovers who had lived twice on earth in different forms, and Dandin's satirical *Tale of the Ten Princes*, which pokes fun at rulers, dignitaries, ascetics and even the very gods. Another work of this type is the picaresque novel by Haribhadra, that was written in Prakrit in the seventh-eighth centuries.

In the south of India the most developed literature was that in Tamil. The first works in this language had appeared in the early centuries A.D., but the major ones, the *Kural* (Couplets), by Tiruvalluvar and the epic poems *Shilappadigaram* (The Jewelled Anklet) and *Manimegalai*, are dated by various scholars as stemming from anything between the second and sixth centuries. In the eighth and ninth centuries *Bhakti* poetry started to gain ground; it extolled the mystical union of man with God in the allegory of the love between a youth and a girl. Hymns composed by the Alvars and the Nayanars (Vaishnavite and Shaivite proponents of *Bhakti*) distinctive for their profound lyricism spread far and wide as folk songs.

In Northern India a new genre of heroic poetry began to appear in the local language. An example of this genre is the Hindi poem by Chand Bardai (1126-1196), entitled *Prithvirajraso*, a ballad which in the tone of a panegyric describes the struggle waged by Prithviraja Chauhan against the Moslem invaders.

Architecture and sculpture were the most developed art forms during this period. Between the sixth and eighth centuries it was mainly cave temples that were built (in Ellora, Elephanta, and somewhat later, Ajanta), or rock-cut temples such as those at Mahabalipuram, or the *ratha* (a temple built in the form of a chariot) at Konarak. This did not demand really complicated techniques: it was easier to hollow out buildings in the rock than to cut stones, transport them over long distances, and then build up high and durable buildings. In Ajanta the cave temples belonged to the Buddhists, while in Ellora Buddhist cave shrines and Hindu and Jaina temples are all found side by side. The cave temples were decorated with bas-reliefs, sculptures or frescoes. The best known of these are the enormous bas-reliefs containing a great many figures representing "Ganga's Descent to Earth" (seventh century) at Mahabalipuram, and "Ravana Who Shakes the Mountain of Kailasa" in Ellora with Shiva and Parvati sitting on the mountain.

In the ninth century temples began to be built from hewn stone. In the north of India temples were parabolic in shape, topped by a canopy in the shape of a lotus flower, while in the south they would be in the shape of a rectangular pyramid. The rooms inside were low-ceilinged and dark; they were sanctuaries to which not everyone had access. The main mass of worshippers merely walked round the

temple on the outside. In the courtyards of these temples and also on their walls, there were sculptures depicting scenes from the epics, or providing symbolic representations of the worship of the particular god, to whom the temples were dedicated. Later on, and particularly in the south, the profusion of sculptured detail became so great that the temples themselves appeared merely as a pedestal for it: statues, high reliefs and bas-reliefs came to fill all the walls right up to the top. Because of this profusion the human eye was no longer able to apprehend the individual scenes or sculptures. Such is the case for example with regard to the temples at Khajuraho (c. 954-1050), where the bas-reliefs, mainly of erotic content, consist of illustrations to the *Kamasutra*, a treatise on the art of love, at Konarak (1234-1264), Orissa, where the temple is covered from floor to ceiling with such intricate and complex sculptural ornament, that each individual stone is like an exquisite piece of jewelry. Later there was to be a marked degeneration in this monumental sculpture. Beginning with the fourteenth century only isolated static, canonical figures were to be found; the vitality and diversity of the earlier period began to disappear. Meanwhile in Tamil regions the art of casting small bronze figures became highly developed and these retained lifelike gestures and a realistic air. One of the finest of such statuettes is "Shiva Nataraja" (The Dancing Shiva), frequent copies of which were later to be found with minor modifications over the whole of Southern India.

The frescoes, like those found in the cave temples at Ajanta, are not encountered ever since the eighth century. Virtually no other paintings of this period have survived. In the temples of Southern India the art of classical dance was sustained in conjunction with ritual ceremonies.

## **INDIA DURING THE PERIOD OF THE DELHI SULTANATE (THIRTEENTH AND EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURIES)**

### **THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE DELHI SULTANATE**

#### **The Formation of the Delhi Sultanate**

At the beginning of the eighth century, the Arabs who had invaded India from the north conquered Sind and established their rule there. Sind was set apart from the rest of the country but this did not affect developments in the rest of India. However from the beginning of the eleventh century onwards India became the arena of attacks by Moslem conquerors of Turk origin, who undertook these campaigns under the guise of a holy war against the infidels. The Indian kingdoms were involved in internecine struggle, and it was difficult for them to withstand these attacks, and gradually in the north of India a large state, ruled over by the Moslem conquerors, was established, which was to be known as the Delhi Sultanate. The emergence of this state, which was later to expand southwards as well, left its mark on the whole history of India. India was drawn into the sphere of the so-called Moslem world.

The first invasion by the Turkish conquerors took place in the year 1001. Later the troops of Mahmud (998-1030), ruler of a state with its capital in Ghazni and incorporating the region then known as Khurasan, invaded the Punjab. Raja Jaipal, who sought to stem his advance, was defeated at Peshawar and committed suicide. After that Mahmud made regular winter incursions into India right up to 1026. He destroyed temples and plundered their rich treasures that had been gathered together by the rulers of the kingdoms over many generations; he collected indemnities from the population and would then depart with caravans of plundered wealth. Mahmud's incursions into Northern India spread over an enormous area ranging from Somnath (Kathiawar) in the west to Kanauj in the Ganges valley in the east. However the only region which he annexed to his own possessions and where he established his direct rule was the Punjab.

During the reign of Mahmud's successors, a period of feuds and constant threat of danger from the Seljuks, the Ghaznavids' capital was transferred to Lahore. In the seventies of the twelfth century, the rulers of the small vassal state of Ghur took advantage of the feuds among the conquerors and captured Ghazni in 1173, and then in 1186 they also conquered the capital of their former overlord, namely

Lahore. The brother of the ruler of Ghur, Muhammad Ghuri, first captured the Punjab and then began to advance further, deep into India. In 1191, during the battle of Tarain, he was defeated by Prithviraja, the Rajput ruler of Delhi and Ajmer, but the following year on the same field of battle he routed the army of the Rajput princes led by Prithviraja, thus opening up for himself the road to the Ganges. Soon he was in control of the whole Yamuna-Ganges valley.

After Muhammad had been killed one of the Turkish slaves, the commander of the guard and governor of Northern India, Qutb-ud-din Aibak (1206-1210) pronounced himself independent sultan of the Ghuri possessions in India with his capital in Delhi. This was how the Delhi Sultanate came into being: after Aibak's death (he fell from his horse during a game of polo) another ruler came to power. He was from the Ghulams (slaves serving in the royal guard), Shams-ud-din Iltutmish. Since certain of his successors were also from the ranks of the slaves serving in the guard, the dynasty came to be known as the Ghulam dynasty.

### **The Ghulam Dynasty**

While Iltutmish was consolidating and expanding his possessions, the Mongol invaders appeared in India, pursuing Jalal-ud-din — the son of the Shah of Khiva they had defeated. By that time the Mongols had already conquered the whole of Central Asia from Manchuria to Turkestan, mercilessly slaughtering the population. The very name of Genghis Khan filled men's hearts with fear. Iltutmish refused to help Jalal-ud-din, and the latter, having plundered the Western Punjab, Sind and Northern Gujarat, withdrew from India. However the threat of further Mongol invasions still hung over India for a long time after and it served to rally the Moslem nobility round the Delhi throne.

During Iltutmish's reign Moslem military commanders came to dominate Northern India. It was in his memory that the enormous Qutb Minar minaret was built in Delhi, work on which was begun in Qutb-ud-din's reign, but completed during that of Iltutmish. The tomb of Iltutmish lies nearby.

At that period the warrior nobility consisted in the main of Turks from Central Asia, who had joined forces in a strong organisation known as the "Forty", since that had been the number of its founders. Officials and religious leaders at that time were Khurasanites (i.e. Tajiks or Persians). Sunnite Islam was adopted as the state religion, while Hindus were regarded by them as infidels (*zimmis*). Persian was the official language of state. The rule in the state was despotic.

Although the first two Delhi sultans were chosen from among the Moslem military chiefs, Iltutmish strove to make the monarchy hereditary; he chose for his successor his daughter Raziyya, whom he

considered a "better man" than his sons. This queen was a brave and clever woman, however the warrior chiefs, owing to their Moslem prejudices, saw subordination to a woman as dishonourable. She ruled for four years and then was put to death. Her reign was followed by a period of tumult and palace coups d'etat. At this time the Mongols made numerous incursions into India and in 1241 they succeeded in capturing Lahore.

Finally, in 1246, the youngest son of Iltutmish, Nasir-ud-din, was exalted to the throne. However real power was in the hands of his able advisor, Ghiyas-ud-din Balban, who in 1265, after Nasir's death, assumed the throne which he was to retain for twenty-two years until 1287. After he came to the throne Balban succeeded in driving back the Mongols and building a chain of fortresses along the North-Western frontier as strongholds in his line of defence. His rule was an incessant struggle to consolidate power. He was merciless in his suppression of uprisings (as that of the inhabitants from the Doab), giving orders for captured insurgents to be trampled on by elephants or skinned alive. He succeeded in braking the strength of the "Forty" and it was with cruel measures that he suppressed the uprising of the Moslem warrior chiefs in Bengal in 1280. The instigators were punished publicly by impalement. After Balban died at an advanced age, rivalry once more broke out among the various groups of feudal lords. In the struggle that followed it was the warrior chiefs from the Turkish tribe of the Khaljis that emerged victorious, and power was assumed by the seventy-year-old Jalal-ud-din Firuz who was to reign from 1290 to 1296.

### **The Reign of the Khaljis**

During the reign of the first representative of the Khalji dynasty Mongol forces again invaded India, but Jalal-ud-din succeeded in routing some of them and in buying off the rest.

The most important event during the reign of Jalal-ud-din Firuz was the march into the Deccan organised by Ala-ud-din, his son-in-law and nephew. After defeating Ramachandra, the ruler of Devagiri of the Yadava dynasty, and plundering his treasures, Ala-ud-din returned to Delhi. Near the capital he treacherously murdered his father-in-law and became the new ruler of Delhi (where he reigned from 1296 to 1316).

This cruel and resolute new ruler was an able commander and an administrator of talent. At that time Mongol incursions were becoming more frequent and Ala-ud-din concentrated all his forces in order to rout the enemy. The cruel streak in his character is plain from the fact that when suspecting a possible rebellion, he demanded that in one night all the Mongols who had settled in the neighbourhood of Delhi during the reign of Jalal-ud-din and who had fought in the



latter's army, should be rounded up and killed, despite the fact that their number was estimated at between fifteen and thirty thousand. In order to swell his coffers Ala-ud-din either confiscated or taxed the rent-free lands of the priests and rich chieftains. In order to forestall any conspiracies he banned banquets and assemblies and peppered the country with his spies.

In order to concentrate the country's land wealth in his own hands, Ala-ud-din decided to introduce small money payments for *iqtadars*, instead of the land grants that had been customary hitherto. In a country where payment in kind had been the predominant practice he had to resort to extreme measures in order to reduce the food prices in the capital and thus ensure the food supply of his badly paid soldiers. The order was given that revenue be collected from all the state-owned lands in the Doab only in the form of grain, and the merchants were forced to deliver it to enormous, specially constructed granaries in Delhi. Prices in the markets of the capital and in the Doab were strictly controlled, special officials were employed to ensure that rules were observed and cruel punishments were inflicted if customers were cheated or given short measure. The tax was raised from a quarter to half of the harvest. Hindus were forbidden to bear arms, dress in rich clothing or ride horseback; these measures were designed to satisfy the more zealous among the Moslems. However, the soldiers were given higher wages.

Initially these strict measures enabled the Sultan to create an enormous and efficient army of 475,000 horsemen and repulse the incursions of the Mongols. The last time the Mongols were to show themselves in India during Ala-ud-din's reign was in 1306 when they were defeated by him on the banks of the Ravi River.

However Ala-ud-din did not really have sufficient resources to keep up an army of great size and he decided to fill his coffers once more by plundering new regions and towns of the Deccan. His officer, Malik Kafur, was sent on such a campaign and succeeded in capturing Devagiri once more in the year 1307, then Warangal, the Kakatiyas' capital (in the region now known as Telingana). Then on his next campaign, in 1311, he captured the Hoysalas' capital Dvarasamudra, and Madura, the centre of Pandya territory. In the next two to three years Malik Kafur undertook further campaigns and reached India's southernmost tip, Cape Comorin. Returning from these campaigns, the army of Ala-ud-din brought with it untold riches—gold, precious stones and horses. The defeated rulers of these southern territories acknowledged themselves to be vassals of the Delhi Sultanate; they were obliged to pay annual tribute.

Ala-ud-din's enormous empire was not a centralised state. In Gujarat, in the latter years of Ala-ud-din's life, his vicegerents rose up against him. The Rajputs remained unsubdued: Rajput epic poems tell of their constant struggle against Moslem garrisons. Bengal was divided up among independent Moslem princes. The Hoysalas and the

Pandyas remained independent except for the fact that they paid tribute. The northern regions beyond the Indus River were still inhabited by independent tribes.

Although the Sultan made generous gifts from the booty brought home after successful conquests, his suspicious attitudes, his confiscations, his harassment of the Hindus, as well as a breakdown of the economy, all gave rise to widespread discontent. Uprisings were sparked off everywhere. After the death of Ala-ud-din (he died from dropsy in 1316), a fierce contest for the throne began during which Malik Kafur was killed, as he tried to assume power. Several months later one of Ala-ud-din's sons was crowned under the title of Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Shah (1316-1320). He annulled all the economic reforms his father had introduced; however, he did not renounce policies of conquest and annexation and sent an army to the Deccan under the command of Khusrau Khan. After this general returned from Madura and Telingana with rich plunder, he killed Mubarak Shah in the hope of becoming the Sultan of Delhi himself. However, he was soon eliminated by another group of Turkish nobles.

Next to accede to the throne was the Warden of the Marches in the Punjab who was crowned under the title Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq (1320-1325) and was the founder of a new dynasty.

### **Tughluq Rule**

The new sultan introduced a number of new measures aimed at putting an end to the shortcomings that had resulted from Ala-ud-din's reforms. The land revenue was reduced to a tenth of the harvest, and irrigation canals were built at the state's expense. Ghiyas-ud-din built for himself in Delhi a whole city in rose-coloured granite, which he encircled with strong fortified walls and named Tughluqabad (now in ruins). Nearby he also erected for himself a mausoleum made of red and white stone, which again was reminiscent of a fortress. It was built in the middle of an artificial lake that has now completely dried up.

Like his predecessors, Ghiyas-ud-din pursued an active foreign policy. In order to fill the coffers of state, once more a campaign of conquest was organised and the armies were sent into the Deccan under the command of his son Jauna Khan. He captured Warangal, the Kakatiyas' capital, which he then renamed Sultanpur. Ghiyas-ud-din himself subdued Eastern Bengal and he compelled the ruler of Western Bengal to accept the status of vassal of the Delhi Sultanate (1324). Jauna Khan on this occasion arranged a lavish welcome for his father in Delhi. However during the elephant procession a wooden pavilion collapsed and Ghiyas-ud-din was killed under its debris. According to the Arabian traveller Ibn-Batutah, this "accident" had been planned by Jauna Khan, who had an eye to the throne. Indeed

soon he was crowned king under the title Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-1351).

Muhammad bin Tughluq was an able commander and a well-educated man; at the same time he was a cruel tyrant and he soon reduced the state to chaos through his thoughtless actions. After deciding that Delhi was too far away from the southern borders of the empire, he moved his court to Devagiri which he renamed Daulatabad. Not only was the court transferred but also all members of the royal household were forced to move as well. A few years later Muhammad bin Tughluq moved back to Delhi but it proved difficult to restore the disrupted economic activities in the environs of the capital.

Since it was essential for the defence of such an enormous empire to maintain a large army and a ramified network of central and provincial administrative institutions, the treasury was in dire need of new resources. Muhammad bin Tughluq introduced additional requisitions (*abwabs*) to be levied from the farmers. These were so large that the now impoverished peasants abandoned their holdings and fled into the forests. The regions grew poorer and the flow of money into the treasury started to run dry. An additional misfortune at this time was a serious drought. And the Sultan resorted to issuing copper coins which were meant to have the same value as the gold and silver ones that had been circulating previously. This step disrupted the monetary system and the country's economy. Merchants refused to sell their wares for the new money. Eventually the Sultan was forced to buy up this token currency in exchange for silver and gold, which drained the state coffers dry. Furthermore, Muhammad bin Tughluq's campaign to Quarajal, a mountainous region in the Himalayas, ended in a terrible catastrophe. Admittedly, he succeeded in forcing the local prince to pay tribute, but on its way home his hundred-thousand-strong army was not only plagued by hunger, rain and the lack of proper roads, but was almost wholly destroyed as a result of ambushes laid by the mountain dwellers.

The last fifteen years of Muhammad bin Tughluq's reign passed in fruitless attempts to put down uprisings that started flaring up all over his enormous empire and disturbances among the people that often took the form of heretical movements. For the cruelty of his repressive measures Muhammad bin Tughluq was nicknamed "Khuni" or the Bloody One. In 1351, after persecuting insurgent emirs he arrived in Sind, where he died of a fever. There and then in Sind the nobility placed on the throne a cousin of the deceased Sultan, Firuz Tughluq (1351-1388).

Firuz was obliged to adopt firm measures to eliminate the disastrous consequences of Muhammad's reign. The new requisitions (or *abwabs*) were no longer levied, land taxes were reduced, five irrigation canals were built in the Doab in order to improve yields, high market dues were abolished, military commanders received gifts

of "villages and towns", and a decree was issued forbidding the use of tortures. A number of privileges were granted to Moslem military commanders, but this only served to fan their separatist leanings.

Yet at the same time Firuz was subjecting to cruel suppression all heretical movements, persecuting the Hindus and the Shiah Moslems. During campaigns against Hindu princedoms (in particular Katehr) he made slaves of the local population and would use their labour on the royal estates. Following their Sultan's example, his officers also began to acquire slaves. According to the historian Barani there was a total of close on 180,000 slaves in the country at the time.

Firuz's attempts to maintain his state intact were fruitless. Bengal and the Deccan had set themselves apart during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq, and expeditions into Sind and Orissa proved unsuccessful. When the aged Sultan died, rivalry broke out between powerful groups of feudal lords, each of which supported their own candidate for the throne.

The final blow to the tottering empire was dealt it by the army of Timur, ruler of Samarkand, in 1398, Timur set out to intimidate the Indians through his cruelty. After liquidating vast numbers of the population he proceeded to build towers out of their skulls. Timur gave orders for a hundred thousand prisoners that he had captured in various parts of Northern India to be butchered in cold blood outside Delhi, in order to make sure that no one dare oppose him in future. The Sultan of Delhi fled to Gujarat. Meanwhile Timur's troops, on entering Delhi, plundered and slaughtered for several days on end. Loaded down with plunder, Timur then returned to Samarkand with thousands of prisoners. In India hunger and disease followed in the wake of his invasion and the empire collapsed.

### **The Sayyid Dynasty**

The last Tughluq Sultan died in 1413, leaving no successor to follow him. In 1414, Khizr Khan Sayyid, former governor of Multan, who had allied himself with Timur and was nominated by the latter as governor of both Multan and the Punjab, captured Delhi and took power into his own hands. Thus 1414 is regarded as the year in which the rule of the Sayyid dynasty began.

Until his death in 1421 Khizr Khan ruled nominally as viceroy of the Timurids. Under his rule the country was still in an impoverished state, land revenue was collected only with the help of troops and the state coffers were kept full thanks to battle plunder brought home after the annual campaigns against neighbouring princedoms. Khizr Khan's rule only extended to Delhi, the Punjab and the Doab. His son and heir, Mubarak Shah (1421-1434), refused in the last year of his reign to submit to Timurid decrees and he began to mint coins bearing his own name, which was seen as a sign of insubordination. He organised a number of campaigns against the feudal lords of the Doab

and certain other regions close to Delhi. Moreover he waged war against the ruler of Malwa, and against the Gakkars for control of the Punjab and against the Timurid ruler of Kabul. Mubarak was eventually murdered by conspirators from among the nobles at court.

The next Sultan was his nephew Muhammad Shah (1434-1445). Buhlul Khan of the Afghan tribe of the Lodi, the governor of Lahore and Sirhind, helped him in his struggle against the ruler of Malwa. As a result Buhlul Khan became an influential figure in the state. He attempted to carry out a coup but unsuccessfully. After the death of Muhammad Shah the next ruler was the last representative of the Sayyid dynasty, Alam Shah (1445-1451). As a result of this rivalry between the various feudal groupings and their separatist aspirations, the sultans of Delhi had become little more than puppets and were but nominal rulers. At that time people even used to say that "the power of Shah Alam (literally the Ruler of the World) stretches from Delhi to Palam" (a small settlement near Delhi, where the Delhi airport is now situated).

### **The Lodi Dynasty**

Buhlul made a second attempt at a coup d'état. This time he succeeded in ousting Alam Shah from power and securing the throne. During his reign, which lasted from 1451 to 1489 he made the Lodi tribe the most privileged élite in the state and incorporated in his army detachments of Afghan tribes. This reign that lasted almost forty years consisted in a constant series of wars aimed at expanding the sultanate. The most formidable of his opponents was Jaunpur, which he finally succeeded in routing in 1479. A number of other petty rulers were also compelled to submit to his rule.

Buhlul's son, Sikandar Shah (1489-1517), attempted to keep the vassal princes and governors under strict control and to this end he set up an intricately ramified organisation of informers. Sikandar was a zealous Sunnite, although his mother was from a Hindu family. In 1504, he set up his residence on the banks of the Yamuna River, in a small fortress at Agra, a convenient site from which to set out on campaigns against the princes of the Doab.

His son Ibrahim (1517-1526), strove to enhance the power of the Sultan while holding in check that of the feudal lords. He did not show preference to the Afghan commanders, declaring that a ruler cannot have relatives or fellow-tribesmen, only subjects and vassals. The largest military undertakings of this ruler were his successful campaigns against Malwa and Gwalior. However his despotic rule and his attempts to break the power of the Afghan military commanders led to unrest. Feudal rivalries and discontent among the feudal lords continued unabated. Eventually, a group of the feudal lords turned to the Timurid ruler of Kabul, Babur, requesting that he should rid them of the Sultan's tyranny. Babur was only too eager to accept the offer.

Indeed, he had already been aspiring to seize the rich Indian lands. In 1526, Babur defeated Ibrahim during the battle of Panipat, thus laying the foundation of the Moghul empire,\* which was to shape Indian history for two hundred years.

#### THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE DELHI SULTANATE

The Moslem conquerors of India seized the lands belonging to Hindu rulers and proceeded to establish their power there. However the Turkish military commanders were unable to introduce radical changes in methods of farming and commerce that had evolved in India over the centuries. For all intents and purposes, relations between peasants and feudal lords had remained the same as before, although some modifications in the form of feudal ownership had ensued. State ownership of land was now more firmly rooted and this enabled the conquerors to maintain their strong armies and control an alien population. It was indeed the state that acquired lands that had formerly belonged to many banished and war-shattered Indian feudal families.

Two kinds of state property existed—the *iqta* and *khalisa* (or crown lands). Revenue officials collected the taxes due from the crown lands. The land revenue was usually estimated approximately; no accurate measurements were made and the taxes were collected from the village community itself. The revenues from such lands were used to finance court expenditure and maintain those officials and warriors who used to receive their remuneration in kind or in money. Some woods and meadows were also regarded as state property. At certain periods of the Delhi Sultanate (particularly during the reign of Firuz Tughluq) royal farms were set up on some of the state lands and these were worked by slaves. However the number of these royal farms was very small.

The bulk of state lands was distributed in the form of conditional grants in return for services rendered. This system was known as *iqta*. *Iqta* was the name given to the small plots, whose owners were known as *iqtdars*, or *wajhdars* (those who received a grant) and also to the large ones, headed by a *muqta*. The *wajhdars* usually collected taxes themselves or through their tax-collectors from the villages or parts of villages granted them. As a rule, their families lived in these villages. Each of these families had to provide a soldier for the state army.

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\* In Khurasan, in the lands of the Afghan tribes and in Northern India, not only the Mongols are referred to as Moghuls, but also the Moslem princes who ruled in those territories previously conquered by the Mongols and intermarried with them. This whole region of Central Asia and the Afghan lands was known as Moghulistan. Babur came to India from that area, and for this reason he and all those who came with him were known as Moghuls. Europeans meanwhile started calling their ruler the Great Moghul.

When Balban attempted to take away the holdings belonging to families in which there were no male members capable of bearing arms, such widespread unrest began that the Sultan was obliged to abandon the idea. In this way the lands of the *iqtdars* could eventually become privately-owned feudal holdings known as *mulk* or *inam*. As for the *muqtas*, a major part of the taxes collected by them went to the state treasury. The state determined the size and form of the land taxes they collected (whether in kind or in money). A fixed share of the revenue was used to maintain the *muqta* and his detachments of fighting men, which consisted of mercenaries. Tenure was conditional, i.e. linked to office, and could not be inherited.

In the Delhi Sultanate there did however exist a category of private landowners that were free to alienate their lands and collect rent according to the customs of the time without any interference by the state. There were not many landowners of this type. They included first and foremost mosques and madrasahs (whose lands were referred to as *waqf*), the guardians of "holy places", generally the tombs of sheikhs, then the *Ulema* (Moslem theologians), poets, certain representatives of the bureaucratic élite and a small group of merchants who had obtained such land (usually referred to as *mulk*) by purchasing it. Often privately-owned land of this type was also acquired by the clearing of jungle or the cultivation of virgin land. However the right to property of this type was retained by descendants usually only when a new settlement in the jungle was founded by a feudal lord able to defend his property against claims from the treasury.

Throughout the whole of the Sultanate period the lands belonging to Hindus remained intact, especially those belonging to the Rajputs. Even before their lands had been conquered by the Moslems the patrimonial estates belonging to this clan had been breaking up. The granting of land in reward for services rendered was becoming a widespread practice in this area. The Moslem conquest accelerated this process insofar as some of the Rajput landowners were wiped out, while others submitted to the rule of the Sultan and received their estates back again, but now as conditional grants (*iqta* holdings). These *iqtdars* were obliged to fight in the Sultan's wars with their detachments and to pay annual tribute to the state treasury. However their lands were handed down to their descendants.

Ala-ud-din's reforms—which included extremely high taxation of the population and additional taxation of Hindu feudal lords, the remuneration of all warriors in money instead of land holdings—fundamentally disrupted the former system and were therefore abolished immediately after his death. Likewise after the death of Muhammad Tughluq the additional heavy taxes or *abwabs*, that he had introduced, were lifted. The Indian feudal state was constantly trying to determine the level of taxation which would ensure high

revenues for the state treasury without reducing the tax-paying landowners to ruin.

Later the *khalisa* lands were drastically reduced, and state control over conditional grants of land gradually loosened. By the fifteenth century *iqta* holdings started to resemble the *inam*, i.e. privately-owned lands received in return for services rendered. Under the rule of the Lodi dynasty the *iqta*-holders did not pay anything to the state treasury although the size of the land revenue was still in principle laid down by the state as before. Actually the feudal landowners strove to levy additional taxes from the peasants in their own interests, and by doing so increased the burden of rural taxation. This they were able to do in view of the weakening control from the central administration. The decline and collapse of the state system of administration and the arbitrary behaviour of the feudal lords led to a significant deterioration in the position of the rural population at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It should also be remembered that the vast majority of the peasants were Hindus and the payment of poll-tax levied on the Hindus by the Moslem rulers was a cruel burden.

The changes that had taken place with regard to the forms of feudal landownership probably had little effect on the peasant life. The village communities remained intact; these the Moslem chroniclers referred to with the Arabic term *jami'at*. For the Delhi Sultanate these communities represented convenient fiscal units. The village headmen came more and more to be regarded as state functionaries, and in recognition of their services small rent-free holdings were put aside for them. Within the village community itself property differences began to make themselves felt more strongly. However these were not so significant as to make any members of the village community immune to the threat of impoverishment that could befall them at times of natural disasters or when the revenue demand was excessive.

Yet at the same time it should be observed that the period of the Delhi Sultanate was marked by a slow but steady development of the productive forces. Indications of this were provided by the growth in the population and the cultivation of land that had formerly been jungle terrain. New settlements appeared and more thorough methods were used for working the land. The majority of the arable land was not provided with irrigation and the harvest was dependent on the monsoons. Water was often obtained from wells with water wheels, but the level of the water in these wells also depended on the amount of rainfall. The Delhi government adopted measures to increase the area of irrigated farming land. In the area around Delhi for instance large reservoirs were built at Haus-i-Shamsi and Haus-i-Khas. Firuz Shah Tughluq built irrigation canals leading from the Sutlej and the Yamuna of a total length of over 150 miles and thus water was brought to large expanses of land. Fifty thousand men were employed on the construction of these canals as forced labour.

India's favourable climate made possible two harvests a year—one



in the autumn (*kharif*) and one in the spring (*rabi*), while in some places where irrigation was available even a third was feasible. The main grain crops were millet and rice, and a total of twenty-one different sorts of rice were known. In addition to these main crops, wheat, barley, various pulses, many varieties of vegetables and fruit, sugar-cane and oil-yielding plants were grown. More land was being set apart for indigo, which was the common dye for fabrics, and also for mulberry trees used to nurture silk-worms.

To judge from indirect evidence, the number of artisans and craftsmen in the Delhi Sultanate was increasing. Rural craftsmen were accepted as members of the village communities. Artisan settlements were coming into being, particularly communities of weavers, but also gunsmiths, copper-workers and those who plied other trades. Artisans followed various trades as their caste occupation. The urban craftsmen would sell their wares on the spot or at local bazaars. Various specialised trades in connection with building had also emerged by this time—such as stone-masonry, brick-laying, etc.

For the requirements of their court the Delhi sultans often set up huge workshops known as *karkhanas*. In those set up by Ala-ud-din seventeen thousand craftsmen were employed (including seven thousand building workers) who were paid from the state coffers. In the reign of Muhammad Tughluq there were four thousand weavers alone working in the *karkhanas*.

The conquest of India by tribes from Central Asia initially led to an increase in caravan trade between India and the Moslem East. Hoards of coins bearing the images of the Delhi sultans have been found not only in Persia and Central Asia, but also as far away as the Volga. Cavalry was the nucleus of the army of the Delhi Sultanate, and since it was virtually impossible to breed horses in India, owing to the lack of suitable pastures, the import of horses was one of the main items of foreign trade. However, the Mongol conquests and their devastation of a number of towns in Iran and Central Asia soon brought about a certain decline in Indian caravan trade.

This made it still more important for the Delhi Sultanate to have access to the ports of the Deccan, which had a long history of extensive overseas trade. India exported cottons and Bengal silks, arms, jewelry and utensils made of gold, silver and copper. Slave trade was common. Captives driven south from Central Asia and Persia were sold, and the inhabitants of the Hindu states, against which a *jihad* or Holy War had been declared, were also made slaves. Slaves were used mainly as house servants.

The capture of the Deccan was extremely significant for the development of internal trade. Salt and coconuts (from which oil and rope—out of the fibres—were made) were brought from the coastal areas. The fertile regions of Bengal, that were rich in rice, sent

produce to the capital, required for the upkeep of the Sultan's enormous armies. The merchants of Kanauj sold sugar throughout India, and in Delhi in particular. However, in the main, rent in kind was prevalent. Victuals and handicraft goods in the state treasury were for the most part used to satisfy the Sultan's requirements, those of his court and his enormous army of mercenaries.

The numerous levies and the various forms of forced labour hindered the expansion of trade and the crafts in the Delhi state. Apart from the *zakat* accepted in all Moslem countries and paid out by the traders and craftsmen and artisans in the form of money to cover 2.5 per cent of an article's cost, available sources mention the *kotwali* (a levy for the town governor), the *mustaghal* (a tax on building sites for houses and small shops), various tolls collected at town gates and ghats, etc.

It is at this period that the names of new towns appear in the chronicles and there are likewise frequent references to the expansion, consolidation and refurbishing of old ones. For the most part this applied to administrative centres and military headquarters, since traders and craftsmen were mainly engaged in attending to the requirements of feudal lords and the armies. Towns were also founded in the so-called "holy places", where pilgrims gathered and fairs were held. Gradually the population of these urban centres grew. However, it was still the feudal lords who were in charge of their administration; often they owned the caravanserais, the craftsmen's stalls and determined market tariffs. Only within the castes was there some semblance of self-government. There was no security of tenure enjoyed by the urban population with regard to their property. The feudal lords could at will raise taxes or force merchants to sell their wares at prices that they themselves laid down. The sway of these feudal lords was particularly oppressive during the reigns of Ala-ud-din and Muhammad Tughluq. It is not surprising that unrest grew among the urban population and it found an outlet in all manner of heretical movements.

As for the peasantry, its protest against oppression often led to flight from the villages. The chronicles, that as a rule were written by court historians, make brief references to "robber tribes" and "detachments of bandits" taking refuge in the jungles. It is possible that these were in fact the fugitive peasants.

The only peasant unrest described in more detail was the uprising in 1419 in the Punjab under the leadership of Sareng followed by "ignorant subjects and benighted men". The feudal lords of the Punjab sent out their troops against him. In the ensuing battle near Sirhind Sareng was defeated and fled to the mountains. However, discontented cultivators started rallying to his banners once more. It was only the army of Khizr Khan, the ruler in Delhi, that was able to inflict final defeat on Sareng. He was taken prisoner and then put to death.

## SOUTHERN AND WESTERN INDIA

### The Bahmani Kingdom

For a short period the Deccan was part of the Delhi Sultanate. As soon as Muhammad Tughluq left Southern India, the insurgent emirs proclaimed one of the military commanders, Abul Muzaffar Ala-uddin Bahman (1347-1358), Sultan. He became the founder of the Bahmani dynasty. At the height of its power the Bahmani kingdom stretched from the Arabian Sea in the west to Orissa in the east. Its northern border ran along the river Tapti and its southern border along the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers. Still further to the south there emerged the kingdom of Vijayanagar, against which the Bahmani armies waged lengthy wars over possession of the fertile Raichur valley that lay between the two. Bahman's southern campaigns were successful. He divided his state into governorships (or *tarafs*)—Gulbarga, Daulatabad, Bidar and Berar—making Gulbarga the capital and renaming it Ahsanabad (to which the name of Gulbarga was restored after his death).

The political life of the Bahmani kingdom was shaped by the wars against Vijayanagar and the internal feuds between two groupings of Moslem feudal lords—the Deccanis (descendants of the Moslems who had long since lived in the Deccan) and the *Pardesis* (i.e. foreigners who had recently arrived from Persia and other lands). This hostility was exacerbated by religious factors, insofar as the *Pardesis* were mainly Moslems of the Shiah sect and the Deccanis belonged for the most part to the Sunnite sect. Their fierce ruler, Ahmad Shah Bahmani (1422-1435), plundered the lands of the Vijayanagar kingdom. He transferred the state capital to Bidar.

The Bahmani kingdom enjoyed its heyday during the period when affairs of state were in the hands of the minister Mahmud Gawan (1446-1481).

He achieved victory over Malwa and many Hindu princes of the Konkan, plundered the Hindu temple at Kanchi, famous for its rich treasures, and conquered Goa. However he was a *Pardesi* and a clique of the Deccanis slandered him, and immediately afterwards the aged minister was killed at a command of the Sultan pronounced when drunk. It was in the days of Mahmud Gawan that the Tver merchant, Afanasy Nikitin, visited Bidar. He wrote of the enormous Bahmani army, of the luxury enjoyed by the nobility and the poverty he encountered among the rest of the population: "The land is very peopled, the country people very ill-clad and the lords are mighty and very rich."

Discord between the feudal lords and resulting civil strife weakened this kingdom and in the sixteenth century it declined. In 1490, Bijapur achieved independence and came to be ruled over by the Adil Shahi dynasty; after a matter of months Berar and Ahmadnagar followed

suit and in this region the Nizam Shahi dynasty established itself. In 1512, Golconda became independent and here the Qutb Shahi dynasty assumed power. It was in 1525 that the last Bahmani Sultan, who no longer possessed any real power, fled to Bijapur. His advisor, Quasim Barid, declared himself ruler of Bidar.

### **Bijapur**

Of the five states which rose up from the ruins of the Bahmani kingdom (Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmadnagar, Bidar and Berar) the largest was Bijapur. The history of the Deccan in this period abounds in wars between these kingdoms and Vijayanagar, and between the five kingdoms themselves. Although the rulers of these states were zealous Moslems, who persecuted the Hindu population in the conquered territories, the wars were fought over political issues and not religious ones. Often this or that of the Deccan states would form an alliance with the Hindu dynasty of Vijayanagar against its Moslem rival. As a rule, these alliances were far from stable. Furthermore the warriors and officers in states ruled over by Moslem dynasties were often Hindus, while at the same time considerable numbers of Moslems placed themselves at the service of Vijayanagar. Indeed the vast majority of the population in the Indian states still adhered to Hinduism. For this reason when the states of this period are designated as Moslem, this is a reference only to the state religion, that was foisted on the people and upheld by the rulers and the nobility.

Bijapur put up ineffective resistance to the Portuguese who captured the island of Goa from it in 1510. Goa became the heart of the Portuguese possessions in the East. In this struggle the small Portuguese detachments, who were disciplined and armed in keeping with the standards then accepted in Europe, time and again demonstrated their superiority to the enormous army of Bijapur. The rulers of Bijapur started inviting Portuguese detachments to serve in their armies, and then they used them in the wars against Vijayanagar.

In 1565, all five Deccan states formed an alliance against Vijayanagar. In the ensuing battle at Talikota on the Krishna River Vijayanagar was defeated. The outcome of the battle was the collapse of the Vijayanagar empire. Five years later Bijapur formed another alliance—this time with Ahmadnagar and Calicut against the Portuguese. An almost three hundred thousand strong Indian army laid siege unsuccessfully to the Portuguese ports of Goa and Chaul, where the garrison consisted of only a few thousand. At the end of the sixteenth century the Moghuls began making incursions into the Deccan.

## Golconda

The second of the large sultanates in the Deccan was Golconda on the eastern coast between the Krishna and the Godavari. Golconda was a rich state and carried on an extensive overseas trade. Its craft industries, particularly weaving, were well developed and its agriculture, thanks to a ramified network of canals, enjoyed rich harvests, and finally there were also famous diamond mines in Golconda. Craftsmen from Golconda were famous for their production of a special sort of fabric and also for fine steel-smelting. Swords, arrowheads and other types of steel weapons were exported from Golconda. The rulers of the Qutb Shahi dynasty had erected the mighty fortress Golconda on the summit of a mountain at the foot of which lay the town. Important posts in this state were held by *Pardehis*; Hindu merchants and money-lenders also enjoyed considerable influence. Hindus living in Golconda were not as a rule subjected to the same kind of persecution they met with in other Moslem states of the Deccan.

## Gujarat

Another rich state ruled over by a Moslem dynasty was Gujarat, situated in the west of India, which did not number among the states of the Deccan. The governor of Gujarat, appointed from Delhi, proclaimed himself an independent ruler soon after Delhi had been laid waste by Timur. The dynasty which he established was known as the Tonk or Ahmad Shahi dynasty, and it was in power until Gujarat was conquered by the Moghuls. Gujarat was one of the most economically developed regions of India. The peasants cultivated sugar-cane, indigo; Gujarat white and printed silk and cotton, velvet and taffeta were widely known beyond the confines of India. The main source of Gujarat's wealth was foreign trade. Cambay was the leading port on India's west coast. From it ships sailed to ports on the Arabian and Red seas and the Persian Gulf; it was possible to buy wares there from countries of South-East Asia and even China, although there was no direct link between China and Gujarat. In Gujarat an Arabian merchant's community grew up, and Parsees, who came from Persia, also settled there from the sixth century on. There grew up a considerable merchant population—including both Moslems and Hindus—in Gujarat ports, in particular Cambay.

The most famous of the Gujarat rulers were Ahmad Shah I (1411-1442) and Mahmud I Begarha (1458-1511), Ahmad Shah strengthened the state and successfully waged war against his Rajput neighbours. The Rajput feudal lords, who had for generations lived within Gujarat territory, were also obliged to submit to him. Of the patrimonial lands belonging to them they were only allowed to retain a

quarter as their private property, while the remaining three-quarters, which were now made conditional grants, were subject to taxation and their former owners had to undergo military service. Ahmad Shah also built the city of Ahmadabad, which became his capital, and he improved the system of administration.

Mahmud Begarha in his turn extended the frontiers of his state. He undertook successful campaigns against Cutch and Kathiawar, conquered the Champaner state and captured the reputedly impregnable Rajput fortress of Girnar. The lands, which he donated to his warriors, were made over to them on a permanent basis as hereditary territories. During his reign, the Portuguese penetrated various parts of India, having already begun to establish their hold over the waters of the Arabian Sea, where they carried out piratical raids against the ships of their rivals—the merchants of the East. Naturally, Gujarat resisted this. Mahmud Begarha concluded an alliance with Egypt against the Portuguese. Initially, the situation appeared favourable for Mahmud Begarha, but in 1509 the Portuguese viceroy, Almeida, inflicted a crushing defeat on the allied fleet near Diu, and Mahmud had to sign a peace with the Portuguese, allowing them to open a trading station at the entrance to the gulf of Cambay. The piracy of the Portuguese undermined Cambay's trading strength and weakened the Gujarat state.

The whole of the reign of Bahadur Shah (1526-1537) passed in uninterrupted warfare. In 1531, he annexed Malwa and in 1534, he captured the strong Rajput fortress of Chitor. During the fighting the garrison had been bravely led by Jawahir Bai, mother of the ruler of Chitor, then still a minor. She was killed during a sortie but the boy was smuggled out of the fortress; then all the men, after donning festive, saffron-coloured robes, left the fortress to engage in mortal combat with the enemy and were killed to a man, while several thousand women, who had remained behind in the fortress, performed the Rajput rite of *jauhar*, that is, burnt themselves to death, in the palace.

Meanwhile pressure on Gujarat from the Portuguese increased. In 1535, Bahadur was obliged to permit the Portuguese to build a fortress at Diu, in return for a promise that they would provide him with assistance against his enemies. However, when the Moghul armies invaded Gujarat, the Portuguese broke their promise. In order to engage in further negotiations with them, Bahadur Shah arrived aboard the flagship of the Portuguese viceroy, where he was treacherously murdered. After his death hostilities broke out in Gujarat between various feudal groupings. As a result of this strife Gujarat fell an easy prey to the Moghuls and was incorporated into their empire.

## **The Portuguese in India**

The Portuguese, who for many years had been equipping expeditions to open up a sea route to India, achieved this aim at last, when, in 1498, an expedition led by Vasco da Gama reached Calicut, a small kingdom and important port on the Malabar coast. While the Portuguese were sailing up and down the coasts of Africa, they were securing gold and ivory from the African tribes in return for no more than pieces of cloth, wine, beads and other such baubles. However, on arriving in India, the Portuguese were amazed to find that European wares, which, to Indian eyes, was crude workmanship, made absolutely no impression on the fabulously wealthy Indian nobility. It emerged that the Portuguese had brought nothing acceptable for trading purposes with them.

On the other hand, Portuguese weapons of war were superior to those of the Indians, in particular when it came to the small and constantly warring states of Malabar. The Portuguese ships which had sailed round Africa, far outstripped with regard to size and speed the small Indian vessels designed in the main for coasting navigation. The well-disciplined Portuguese detachments, equipped with naval cannons,arquebuses and, later, muskets had no difficulty in defeating large Indian armies, whose only weapons were "small swords and round shields" or "small spears" (according to the report of a German merchant who visited India with Almeida's squadron in 1505). This meant that though the Portuguese had not brought any goods with them that were acceptable for trading purposes, they were in a position to obtain Indian goods by force. Their aim was to hold sway over the Eastern seas, to which end they dealt very cruelly with their rivals, the Eastern merchants at sea and in the ports of India, Arabia and Africa, everywhere where Indian wares were bought and sold. The lack of co-ordination between the Malabar states enabled the Portuguese to consolidate their position, stirring up the various states against each other and encouraging rivalries between the feudal lords in the coastal territory. Whenever attempts were made to resist them, the Portuguese responded by firing at the seaports and coastal villages from their ships, and then disembarked troops to plunder, burn and kill, cut down palm groves, and destroyed everything they could not actually take away with them.

Vasco da Gama himself had fired on the ports wreaking destruction during his first visit to India. Subsequent military expeditions—led by Cabral (1500), Vasco da Gama (1502) and d'Albuquerque (1510-1511)—enabled the Portuguese to capture key positions and the Bijapur island of Goa, that was to become the focal point of all Portuguese possessions in the East. These Portuguese fortresses scattered along the coast of the Persian gulf, spreading out from Ormuz, then along the coasts of Africa and Arabia, the western and eastern coasts of India, Ceylon, the Straits of Malacca, the Molucca

Islands, to the region that is now Thailand, and even as far as China, provided stop-overs for Portuguese ships in need of repair, reliably defended storage places for various commodities (in particular, spices and cotton fabrics) that were sent each year to Portugal, and strongholds for Portuguese forces. The Portuguese troops did not succeed in penetrating the interior regions of India. In their Indian territories the Portuguese cruelly exploited the local population, although in the captured villages near Goa they tried to retain the communities. The religious intolerance of the Portuguese (they destroyed Hindu temples and the Inquisition set up in Goa in 1560 engaged in cruel religious persecution) incensed many of the local inhabitants.

The Portuguese monopoly of maritime trade in this area undermined India's well-established trade links with other countries of the East and cut off the Indian interior from the outside world, thus holding back its development. Devastating wars, destruction of ports and annihilation of the local population along the Malabar coast, all slowed down the development of this area for a long time to come. Gujarat had also been weakened by these developments.

In the course of these hostilities between the Portuguese and the local Indian armies, the former, on account of their superior weaponry, were able not only to retain their possessions, but even to extend them. However as soon as their supremacy at sea was undermined by the appearance of Dutch ships in the Indian Ocean and the south seas, the Portuguese were no longer in a position to stand up to the armies of the local Indian rulers. These armies started to win back from the Portuguese one stronghold after another.

### **Vijayanagar**

While the Bahmani state was coming into prominence, a number of other independent states were taking shape to the south of it—the sultanate of Madura, the kingdom of the Reddis, to name but two. Soon two brothers, governors appointed by Muhammad Shah Tughluq to administer Kampili—Harihara and Bukka from the Sangama dynasty—succeeded in setting up a small state. On the banks of the Tungabhadra they built the strong fortress of Vijayanagar and began gradually to extend their territory. By 1346 they had gained control of the Hoysalas' state, and the following year control of the state ruled over by the Kadambas from Banavasi; by 1360 the Shambucharaya kingdom in Northern Tamil-nad, and in the seventies the sultanate of Madura. The Reddis had to relinquish part of their territory and later that state was to be finally destroyed in 1420. In this way by the 1370s Vijayanagar embraced almost the whole of Southern India. Later Vijayanagar was to clash with the Bahmani Sultanate, and after its decline with the other Deccan states. However, despite the incessant wars lasting over a period of almost



two hundred years the borders of Vijayanagar were virtually where they had been before.

In 1486, in the wake of feudal unrest and the victorious onslaught of the Bahmani troops and the ruler of Orissa on the territory of Vijayanagar, the power of the Sangama dynasty was overthrown by a Vijayanagar general, to whom, at his coronation, the title Narasimha Saluva was accorded. He succeeded in winning back a large part of the lands captured from Vijayanagar; however during the reign of his sons history was to repeat itself, for the military commander Vira Narasimha overthrew his ruler in 1505 and founded the Tuluva dynasty.

During the reign of his brother Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1529) the Vijayanagar empire reached the height of its power. Krishnadeva Raya improved the administrative division of the country and the running of fiscal affairs, and he also instituted a new higher assessment of the revenue from service grants. After establishing friendly relations with the Portuguese, Krishnadeva Raya began to obtain with their help horses from Persia and Arabia, while the Portuguese authorities placed restrictions on the imports of horses to the Deccan sultanates. This brought more military victories to Vijayanagar since at that time the cavalry was the backbone of the Indian armies. The Moslem dynasties of India in the past had no trouble in obtaining horses from other friendly countries that had also professed Islam—Arabia and Persia. However, the emergence of Portuguese power in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf changed everything: now it was precisely the Portuguese who decided which Indian states would be allowed to import horses from overseas.

Despite the existence of a number of vassal princedoms, the Vijayanagar empire was more centralised than previous states in the south of India. Although the head of state was known as the *maharajah* all the power was often concentrated in the hands of his minister, the *mahapradhana*. The *maharajah* had a large council of state, which apart from courtiers also included important feudal lords and representatives of merchant communities. Provincial governors were directly accountable to the *mahapradhana*. They were usually changed every two or three years in order to avoid the risk of any separatist activity. They had to collect land taxes from the state lands and remit them to the treasury and also levy tribute from feudal *amaranayaka* landowners and vassal princes, and were themselves entitled to a small share of the land revenue. The provinces were divided into districts placed under the authority of government officials.

State lands were granted, under certain conditions, to warriors in return for services rendered. The *amaranayakas* differed from the *iqtadars* in that they themselves fixed the size of taxes to be levied from peasants and they were also entitled to alienate their land. The tribute which the *amaranayakas* paid into the state treasury was not

connected with the size of the taxes levied from the peasants. It depended upon the influence of this or that feudal lord at court. As a rule the *amaranayakas* paid into the treasury about one-third of the revenues obtained from their estates, after deducting the expenses incurred in connection with the upkeep of detachments of soldiers. However, the *amaranayakas* economised on these items and they started maintaining far smaller numbers of foot soldiers and cavalymen. Theoretically the lands of the *amaranayakas* could not be handed down to their descendants, but in practice these lands often remained in the possession of one and the same family for almost the whole of Vijayanagar's history. Commanders of small detachments in the *amaranayakas'* army also received plots of land either from the *amaranayakas* or from the ruling prince. These holdings were always handed down from father to son.

The temples numbered among the powerful private landowners of that time. They usually became economic and cultural centres for large areas round about. Pilgrims would flock to the temples and fairs started up; craftsmen and merchants would settle near the temples and the temples themselves engaged in trading and money-lending transactions. Some of the craftsmen were directly engaged in work for the temple and received payment in kind and in addition a plot of temple land, which in practice was passed on from father to son together with the duties to be performed in the temple's service. The temples were part of the overall hierarchy of the ruling class: they paid tribute to the feudal lords placed above them, while they in their turn had their own vassals who were obliged to defend the temple in case foreign troops or marauders might attack.

A large proportion of the villages came under the jurisdiction of the Brahman *sabhas*. Often these might be very small possessions: one village might belong to a hundred Brahmans. However these were nevertheless groups of Brahman landowners, insofar as the lands were worked by tenants or members of the untouchable caste, who were treated by the Brahmans as little more than serfs.

Large village communities, typical of the preceding period, were now broken up. As a rule they embraced the lands of only one village. Farming lands were divided, while the fallow land was the collective property of the community and not subject to taxation. In Tamil-nad, where there were many irrigated lands, they were often shared out by casting lots, since in drier years the holdings situated on higher ground would not receive enough moisture.

The *amaranayakas* strove to increase the taxes and their overall total appears to have grown. In the middle of the fourteenth century it was decided that almost all payments should be made in money form and this made things even harder for the peasantry. To judge by available inscriptions, some communities were obliged to sell part of the village lands or simply resettle elsewhere. At that time community members were beginning to lose their rights. The *amaranayakas* appointed headmen and

scribes. The real property rights of the community member (*kanyachi*) came more and more to find expression in the fact that he could regain possession of his land even after a long interval. A large number of village community members soon got the status of tenants-at-will (*paiakari*) who worked the land in return for a share of the harvest. The *paiakari* were often in debt to the landowner and when the land they had been working was alienated, they too would be passed on like serfs to a new owner. Of course all these developments led to discontent among the peasants. Their protest would often find expression in the fact that the cultivators would abandon the villages, however there are also references to the suppression of large-scale uprisings in 1379, 1506 and 1551.

The power of the feudal lords was increasing steadily not only in the villages but also in the towns. Urban affairs were now in the hands of governors appointed by the central administration (instead of assemblies attended by members of various castes as had been the practice previously) and the levying of seaport and market dues was being taken over by feudal lords and money-lenders. The feudal lords who had come to dominate Vijayanagar steadily grew richer. The capital impressed visiting travellers by its sheer size, its seven enormous fortified walls, the size of its population, the wealth of its markets and jewellers' district, and the entertainments available. However the peasants, in the words of the Portuguese chronicler Nuniz, were obliged to pay nine-tenths of their harvest to the *amaranayakas*, who in their turn gave between a third and a half of their income to their ruler. It would appear that Nuniz is here referring to the *paiakari*.

After the death of Krishnadeva Raya a feud again broke out, this time between the ruler Achyuta (1530-1542), Krishnadeva Raya's brother, and the minister Rama Raya, which developed into an internecine struggle between two feudal groupings. After Achyuta's death, Rama Raya placed Achyuta's nephew, Sadashiva, on the throne, but in practice it was he himself who assumed power. Vijayanagar started concluding alliances first with one Deccan state then with another, and was constantly invading and plundering the lands of its enemies. This led the sultanates of the Deccan to unite against Vijayanagar and at the battle of Talikota in 1565 Rama Raya's army was routed. The capital of Vijayanagar was razed to the ground.

After the battle of Talikota Vijayanagar fell rapidly into decline. By the beginning of the seventeenth century it was no more than a small kingdom with its capital in Penugonda. Many of the empire's former vassal states were now independent: Madura, Tanjore, Jinji, Ikkeri (or Bednore). A new state also emerged at this time, namely Mysore.

Rama Raya's brother, Tirumala, now proclaimed himself ruler of Vijayanagar and it was he who founded the Aravidu dynasty, the last of the Vijayanagar dynasties. The most prominent ruler of this dynasty was Venkata II (1586-1614), who succeeded in restoring the empire almost to its former size. However after his death a long struggle began between various claimants to the throne, in which neighbouring states also took

part. Recently reconquered territories were again able to break away. After a long struggle the throne was secured by Rama II (1614-1630), who throughout his life was engaged in hostilities against Madura and the suppression of uprisings in his vassal states. During the reign of Shrirangam II (1642-1670) the territory of what had been the Vijayanagar empire was divided between Bijapur and Golconda, while the former ruler of the empire spent his time between the courts of these two former vassals, where he lived was an insignificant sponger.

## **INDIAN CULTURE BETWEEN THE THIRTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES**

### **Religion**

After the Delhi Sultanate had been set up India found itself within the cultural orbit of the so-called Moslem world. The ideas of Islam started to penetrate Sind in the seventh century and other parts of Northern India in the ninth century. But in the Delhi Sultanate Islam was made the state religion that was foisted upon the local population by force. Various sections of the Hindu population adopted the new religion, a small part under force and others because of the privileges to which it gave them access, since only Moslems were able to hold prominent posts. A third group took this step in order not to have to pay the *jizya* or poll-tax on non-Moslems, while members of the lower castes did so in the hope of avoiding the disadvantages attendant on their status.

The new conquerors did not come alone to India. Soon they began to be followed by their relatives and tribesmen; Moslem scholars and poets from other countries also gathered at the courts of the Indian sultans. As a result a Moslem population grew up and in some areas (Bengal for example, where after the decline of Buddhism large groups of former Buddhists were converted to the new faith) Moslems came to constitute the majority of the population. However in India, as opposed to other Moslem countries, Islam was to remain one of the two main religions, never to become the single one. By the end of the period of the Delhi Sultanate, Moslems constituted the ruling class in most parts of the country. The majority of officers and soldiers in the Delhi armies were Moslems and this also applied to the governors and officials in cities. On the other hand, Hindus were still in charge of tax collection and it was they who made up the bulk of the merchants and money-lenders. As a rule the peasants also remained Hindus.

Despite fierce clashes between the Hindus and the Moslems, their long years of coexistence within the same country led to mutual influence and a sharing of beliefs and customs. Indian Moslems adopted the caste system, started to venerate the local gods, so that eventually they came to worship gods that had never been revered by Moslems before; they also adopted some aspects of Yoga philosophy, started taking part in the Hindu festivals, while Islam as such in the Indian context started to assume a pantheistic aura. The Hindus, in their turn, came under the in-

fluence of the ideas of Moslem brotherhood, the way of life followed by the *Sufi* orders and their teaching concerning the existence of various paths to be followed to achieve union with God. Already in the first half of the fourteenth century Moslem leaders objected to the confusion in the minds of the people as to Rama, one of Vishnu's incarnations (*avatars*), and Rahim (the Merciful—an epithet applied to Allah). It is easy to grasp why Islam took root in India mainly in the garb of *Sufi* ideas, as this mystical doctrine cleared the way for the inclusion in Islam of various currents of thought not really compatible with orthodox Moslem trends.

The conflict between the *Ulemas*, Moslem theologians who upheld a Koranic intransigence of Islam, and the *Sufis*, the majority of whom accorded pride of place not to a scholastic interpretation of the Koran but rather to the revelations of the shaikhs, who had become spiritual teachers within their order, continued throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Among the *Sufis* themselves there were some orders which upheld ideas and rites, which were closer to those of Hinduism (the Chishtia and Firdousi orders for example), and others which objected violently to the "innovations" which had been introduced into Indian Islam (these included the Shattarya and Suhrawardi orders).

The disputes in which Moslem theologians in other Islamic countries were embroiled also affected the Moslem community in India. The most famous *Sufi* shaikhs at that period were: Nizam-ud-din Auliya (d. 1325), known for his tolerance to Hindus and the high moral principles he demanded of his followers; Ala-ud-doula Simnani (1261-1336) who on the contrary appealed to the *Sufis* to adhere closely to Sunnite beliefs; Sharaf-ud-din Ahmad Maneri, famous for his epistles written in the mid-fourteenth century, in which he expressed tolerance with regard to the Hindu customs, which had penetrated Moslem circles, and came out against the secularisation of the shaikhs, demanding first and foremost of these spiritual teachers that they renounce worldly comforts; Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-Shakar (1175-1265) enjoyed wide popularity and translated into Hindi the mystical dictums upheld by the *Sufis* of his order who by their dances and recitals of holy songs brought themselves to a state of ecstasy: Farid-ud-din was renowned for his gentleness and humaneness (He used to say: "The needle is better than the knife, for the needle sews together, while the knife rends asunder."), however the hymns attributed to him, that have been preserved in the collection of sacred writings of the Sikhs, known as the *Adi Granth*, would appear to have been written considerably later. The same applies to the biography and teaching of Muin-ud-din Chishti (1141-1236) who came to India from Sijistan.

The rapprochement between Hindu and Islamic ideas made itself particularly felt in the later stages of the *Bhakti* movement. This movement of the oppressed strata of feudal society (in particular the merchants and craftsmen in the towns) provided a religious and mystical outlet for dissatisfaction with and opposition to feudal rule. Instead of the religious intolerance and scholasticism of both official Hinduism and Islam the

advocates of *Bhakti* propagated the idea of God, one and only, devotion to whom was more important than religious doctrine and who was within reach of any man of whatever caste or faith. In the principle of the equality of all men before God proclaimed in the *Bhakti* teaching, one may discern a reflection of the ideal of social equality, of protest against those in power, against the leaders of both religious movements, whether Hindu or Islam, against the privileged position of the Moslems and the caste hierarchy of the Hindus. Naturally enough, it was for the most part Hindus who were associated with the *Bhakti* movement. However certain prominent representatives of the movement had originally been Moslems; most important of all was the fact that *Bhakti* spiritual teachers addressed themselves not only to Hindus but to Moslems as well. They expounded their teaching in the form of hymns in the various local languages. These hymns were sung to popular tunes with which the preachers' audiences were already familiar. In this accessible form *Bhakti* ideas were spread among wide strata of the population and the hymns frequently became folk songs. This was facilitated by the fact that the preachers of *Bhakti* expounded their religious principles in the form of parables, taking examples from Nature or the life of the people, and that they described man's striving towards God in the terms of his attachment to his beloved. The *Bhakti* movement gained ground in various parts of India and it did not have any one particular organisational centre.

The greatest influence within the *Bhakti* movement was that enjoyed by a Moslem weaver named Kabir (c. 1380-1414). He sang his songs in Braj (one of the colloquial dialects which went to form the basis of modern Hindi). He preached that God was neither Rama nor Allah but was within man's heart and God demanded not hostile treatment of infidels but union. In the fifteenth century, the town of Pandharpur in Maharashtra became the centre of the *Bhakti* movement. It was there that the Hindu Namdev, son of a tailor, came out against the injustices of the caste system. At the beginning of the 16th century there appeared a sect known as *Sathpanth* (or the Right Path) which won a wide following in Gujarat, Sind and the Punjab. The members of the sect attacked wealth and advocated diligence and honesty: they welcomed into their ranks all men regardless of their social status. Meanwhile in the Punjab there emerged the sect of the Sikhs (or disciples). The movement's founder was a Hindu by the name of Nanak (1469-1539), a trader in grain from Lahore, and his followers, apart from merchants and artisans, included peasants of the Jat caste. Nanak came out resolutely against the inequalities stemming from the caste system and demanded from his followers that they eat together, regardless of caste differences. Rejecting the idea of the hermit's life and asceticism, Nanak called upon his followers to take active steps designed to promote the welfare of their fellow men. He adopted the organisational structure of the *Sufi* order with the idea of the disciple's complete submission to his spiritual teacher and became the first of the ten Gurus (spiritual mentors or lead-

ers) revered by the Sikhs. Finally, in Bengal there appeared a religious teacher by the name of Chaitanya (1486-1534) who linked in one faith the principles of *Bhakti* and the Vaishnavite cult of Krishna. He accepted as his followers men from any caste and also Moslems. Chaitanya equated the love of Radha and Krishna with man's love for God and he used ritual processions and the chanting of love-songs to arouse in himself and his followers a state of ecstasy, during which, according to his teaching, love of God reached its highest point and revelation would ensue.

The various religious reform movements and new sects which began to oppose the caste system themselves gradually began to develop into closed endogamous castes. The followers of many of these teachings gradually began to donate part of their income, on a regular basis, to the leaders of their sects, who in time began to regard these donations as their legitimate feudal dues. This meant that the leaders of the sects began to emerge as petty feudal lords. This occurred, for example, in the case of the *Sathpanth* and Sikh movements.

### Literature

Since Persian had become the official language of the Delhi Sultanate, literature, and in particular poetry, now began to appear in this language. Persian also exerted a considerable influence on the emergence of a new language in Northern India known as Urdu (the language of the camp), a language Indian in its grammar but mainly Persian and Arabic as to vocabulary. The leading poet of that period was Amir Khusrav (1253-1325), who wrote not only in Persian but also in Urdu which he referred to as Hindawi. By this time, poetry was already appearing in the new Indian languages: it took the form of heroic ballads in Gujarati, Marathi and Punjabi, and the poetry of the *Bhakti* movement that was written in Hindi (Kabir, fifteenth century), Marathi (Namdev, fifteenth century), Punjabi (Nanak, late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries), etc. In their poetry writers of the *Bhakti* cult used many elements of folklore. Persian prose-writing of that period took the form of chronicles.

If we discount the poetic chronicle of the Kashmiri rulers, the *Rajatarangini* (River of the Rajas) that was written in Sanskrit in the middle of the twelfth century by the poet Kalhana, no chronicles were written in India before the Moslem conquest. Abu Rayhan Biruni from Khwarazm (973-1048), who had been taken prisoner by Mahmud and brought to Ghazni, accompanied his master on a journey to the Punjab (apparently in the capacity of astrologer). He made a scrupulous record of all the available information on India. He then compiled an encyclopedic work entitled *India* that constitutes an invaluable historical source.

The first real chronicle was the work of an Iranian by the name of Minhaj-ud-din Juzjani (born in 1193), who fled to India to escape the Mongol conquerors. He entitled his chronicle *Tabagat-i-Nasiri* in honour of his patron, Sultan Nasir-ud-din Mahmud. In the fourteenth century, valuable chronicles in Persian were compiled by Zia-ud-din Barani

and Shams Siraj Afif, which constituted models of prose-writing in that language. Both writers entitled their chronicle *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* in honour of Firuz Shah Tughluq.

### **Architecture**

During the period of the Delhi Sultanate the first buildings for Moslem worship were erected—mosques, minarets, mausoleums and madrasahs. These were buildings of a shape unfamiliar in India: they incorporated no sculptural ornament, yet were striking in their proportions and beauty of line. The Qutb Minar minaret is an impressive, high tower with a ribbed surface and is faced with red sandstone. The ornament is geometrical in character and is blended with Arabic calligraphic inscriptions. It is an elegant and impressive edifice. The Iltutmish mausoleum is a square domed building with an arched entrance on all four sides. It was to serve as a model for later mausoleums. Its walls are decorated by ornament and calligraphy. The buildings of the Tughluq period are characterised by simplicity of lines, yet they cannot fail to impress through their mighty grandeur. The ruins of the town of Siri built by Ala-ud-din, and those of Tughluqabad, built by Muhammad Tughluq, provide an idea of the fortifications and urban architecture characteristic of the Delhi Sultanate. During the era of the Lodi dynasty certain elements of Hindu style start to appear in Islamic architecture. The buildings of the Lodi period are small yet elegant. Moslem architecture also developed in the capitals of various Deccan sultanates—such as Bidar, Mandu, Ahmadabad, Gulbarga. At the same time the Moslem conquest hindered the development of Hindu architecture. Some temples were destroyed and no significant new buildings were erected.



## **INDIA AT THE TIME OF THE MOGHUL EMPIRE (SIXTEENTH-EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES)**

### **THE FORMATION OF THE MOGHUL STATE**

The existence of the Delhi Sultanate, the emergence of a ruling class of Moslem feudal lords, the long coexistence of Hindus and Moslems and the cross-influences between the two—all this helped pave the way for the establishment of a new and powerful Moslem empire in the north of India. Although the coastal regions of India—Malabar, Gujarat, Coromandel and also Bengal, which had long been carrying on brisk maritime trade in spices and fabrics with the Arab countries, Iran, Malaya and the Molucca Islands, were more economically developed than other parts of the sub-continent, they were rent by inner contradictions and their strength was undermined by the interference of European trading companies which were gradually ousting the Indians from maritime trade. All this goes to explain why in the seventeenth century the Moghul empire with its feudal centralised structure was able to put down resistance and overwhelm a significant part of Southern India.

The founder of that new state in Northern India was the Timurid (descendant of Timur alias Tamerlane) Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur (1526-1530), former ruler of Ferghana, driven out of Central Asia by the Uzbeks who had come there from Siberia, Muhammad Babur was helped and supported by another Timurid, his relative and the ruler of Herat. Babur gained control of Afghan territories and established himself in Kabul but he considered that only by conquering India would he come to head a rich and powerful state. In 1518 and 1524, Babur led attacks against the Punjab; then in December 1525, he invaded India once more at the head of a strong army consisting of warriors, who had come from Central Asia, and also of Afghans and Gakhars. Making use of techniques applied by the Mongols—the art of surprise cavalry attacks and of deploying troops behind the cover of carts knotted together by ropes, Babur finally succeeded in routing the army of the Delhi sultan, Ibrahim-Shah Lodi, in the battle of Panipat, in 1526. A year later, in the battle of Sikri, he defeated the Rajputs led by Rana Sanga, an experienced general and the ruler of Chitor, anxious to unite under his rule all the Rajput territories. These two victories consolidated Babur's rule over

Northern India. Later he succeeded in capturing almost the whole of the Ganges valley.

Some of the Afghan detachments returned home loaded with plunder; Babur granted lands to the warriors who remained in India (in return for their services), that later came to be known as *jagirs*. All the management of such estates was supervised by bailiffs, for the most part Hindus, who knew the customs of the country and the size of the revenue that the peasants would be able to pay.

Babur ruled over India for three years. He was a most educated and observant man, also a poet possessed of a sensitive understanding of art. The memoirs he left are written in a simple, precise language. He regarded Hindus as "infidels" and looked down upon them, but he did not persecute them.

Before his death Babur divided his possessions between his sons, leaving his main possessions to his eldest son, Humayun, and giving orders to the others, who had received the Punjab, Kabul and Kandahar, to submit to his authority.

Humayun attempted to extend his domains by conquering Gujarat, parts of Rajputana and Bihar. Despite initial success, Humayun was unable to consolidate his victory owing to internal feuds. His brothers, anxious to break away from him, attempted to seize Delhi. Humayun's main rival was the leader of the Afghan feudal lords in Bihar and Bengal, Sher Khan Sur. Humayun was routed in battles against Sher Khan in Bihar and after that he fled to Sind. There he married the fourteen-year-old daughter of the local Moslem commander and, in 1542, she was to bear him a son, Akbar. Not long afterwards pursued by some of his brothers, Humayun found himself obliged to flee still further—this time to Iran, and Akbar was taken into the care of Humayun's brother, Kamran, then ruler of Kabul.

Humayun was a connoisseur of Persian literature and was a brave commander in battle, but his weakness for opium impaired his judgment. In his day, when in Delhi, Humayun attempted to introduce a system of administration for the empire, however the principles behind this system were artificial, far removed from real life. He divided his courtiers into three groups: ministers, religious leaders and artists (poets, dancers, etc.). He also set up four government departments: the Fire Department, that was made responsible for military affairs; the Water Department that regulated irrigation and had charge of the royal wine stocks; the Land Department in charge of taxation, the management of *khalisa* lands and construction work; there was also an Air Department, which was concerned with matters connected with the activities of religious leaders, poets and historiographers, and also with their remuneration. This administrative structure, which sought to combine essential matters with those of minor importance, could not be stable and it was rejected once Sher Khan came to the throne.

Between 1540 and 1545 Sher Khan, who had assumed the title Sher

Shah, was ruling in Delhi. He saw his prime task to be holding in check the feudal lords, especially those of Afghan stock in Bihar and Bengal, on whose support, incidentally, he had relied when he had seized power. To this end he began to make strict demands on the *jagirdars* (holders of *jagirs*) that they should maintain a fixed cavalry detachment (the number of horsemen would depend on the size of the *jagir*), which constituted the core of the state army. In order to maintain control over the situation Sher Shah introduced compulsory branding of horses with the stamp of the *jagirdar* and regular inspections of troops, in order to put an end to the *jagirdars'* former practice of hiring any available men at random and then dismissing them again once inspections were over. Sher Shah sought to fix the share of crops due to the state and to hold in check, in the interests of the treasury, the arbitrary demands of the tax collectors determined without exact measurement of the extent of peasant holdings and then, on that basis, the size of the harvest. He insisted that his army should only be paid in money and attempted wherever possible to replace taxes in kind with taxes in money. Sher Shah mercilessly suppressed the peasants' resistance and all separatist movements (for example, the uprising of the Afghan Niazi tribe living in the Agra region).

In his efforts to extend the borders of his state Sher Shah, like Humayun, set out to conquer the Rajput states, so as to force his way through to the ports on the west coast. However, in the year 1545 while laying siege to one of the Rajput fortresses—Kalinjar—Sher Shah met his death.

#### THE REIGN OF AKBAR

Once again a struggle for the throne broke out among the Afghan feudal lords. Power was eventually seized by Sher Shah's youngest son, who reigned until 1554. After his death fierce hostilities raged once more, this time between four claimants to the throne. Humayun, who had recently arrived from Iran with a motley army, consisting of Turks, Persians, Afghans, Turkomans and Uzbeks, took advantage of this situation. He routed the troops of the other claimants and took Delhi in 1555. However his rule was to be short-lived, for a few months later he fell from a marble staircase crashing to death. The Turkoman, Bairam Khan, guardian and protector of the thirteen-year-old prince Akbar, hastened to place his charge upon the throne, while continuing himself to act as regent.

At that time the realm of the Moghuls did not extend beyond the Ganges-Yamuna valley, for links with the Punjab and the Afghan lands in the north had been cut off. The main threat to Moghul power was Hemu, the commander-in-chief of one of the Sur sultans. Despite his "humble" origins (he came from a family of Hindu traders), Hemu

achieved prominence as a talented general. He captured Delhi and proclaimed himself ruler under the title Raja Vikramaditya. In the all-important battle against the Moghuls at Panipat in 1556, Hemu succeeded in making inroads against the flanks of Akbar's army which outnumbered his, but he was wounded in the eye by a chance arrow and fell from his elephant. Now that they could no longer see their commander, Hemu's men fled (as was the usual practice among mercenaries in India once their officer, on whom their remuneration depended, had died), and Akbar won the battle. There and then on the battle-field, at the injunction of Bairam Khan, Akbar began to distribute grants of land among his officers and confer on them titles of honour.

For almost fifty years that Akbar was in power (1556-1605) Moghul power was firmly established in Northern India. Akbar made Agra, a city on the banks of the Yamuna, his capital.

### **Akbar's Conquests**

Initially it was Akbar's regent Bairam Khan who held the real power. He captured Ajmer and the fortress of Gwalior from the Rajputs and established Moghul power in the Punjab. However, being a member of the Shiah sect, he allocated high ranks and grants to those who shared his beliefs, which gave rise to hostile resistance from the Sunnites at court. In 1560, another clique at court seized power. Bairam Khan was banished "with honour" to Mecca, but on the way, in Gujarat, he was slain.

For a time power was in the hands of an Uzbek clique, men related to Akbar's wet-nurse. During this period Malwa was added to the Moghuls' possessions. The ruler of Malwa, Baz Bahadur, fled and was later to enter the service of Akbar. His beloved, the dancing-girl Rupmati, preferred death to captivity and committed suicide. Baz Bahadur and Rupmati were to become the subject of a number of Indian ballads.

Soon, after ridding himself of would-be favourites and counsellors, Akbar began to rule on his own. The eighteen-year-old youth was intelligent, strong and brave; he was fond of hunting and possessed a phenomenal memory, yet despite all the efforts of his teachers he showed no desire to learn to read or write. At an early age he realised that to rule India was possible only with the support of both the Moslems and the Hindus. The first task he set himself was to secure the support of the militant Rajputs and he concluded alliances with them, strengthened further by marriage with Rajput princesses. The Rajput cavalry now joined the Moghul army, led by Man Singh, a talented commander and foster-son of the ruler of Amber. This shift in Rajput allegiance to the side of the Moslem ruler led to protest in orthodox Rajput circles, where it was held that Hindus brought dishonour upon themselves by being at court.

With the help of his Rajput allies Akbar subdued the insurgent Rajput states, and annexed Chitor in 1568, Ranthambhor in 1569 and the larger part of Rajputana. Only the raja of Mewar, Pratap Singh, took refuge in the mountains with a handful of followers to continue the struggle against Akbar for almost a quarter of a century.

Akbar's general, Asaf Khan, took possession of the extensive kingdom of Gondwana, that was ruled over by a *rani* called Durgavati. The princess fought bravely and after defeat stabbed herself with a dagger. On capturing this rich domain and plundering the treasury of its former rulers, Asaf Khan regarded himself as sufficiently powerful to become an independent ruler. He aligned himself with insurgents in the Punjab, where unrest began in 1563 and was led by other would-be separatists among Akbar's generals. The insurgents captured Lahore and proclaimed Akbar's young brother, then living in Kabul, their ruler. Influential Uzbek chiefs from Sambhal, so-called *Mirzas*, joined forces with the insurgents. They all opposed Akbar's admission to court of various Rajput Hindu princes. As luck would have it for Akbar, the insurgents proved unable to establish proper liaison between the various groups and in 1567 the rebellion of the feudal lords was suppressed. The *Mirzas* fled to Gujarat.

In Gujarat, after the treacherous murder, in 1537, of Bahadur Shan by the Portuguese, the struggle for power continued between the various feudal cliques formed on the basis of common ethnic origins—Turks, Afghans, Abyssinians, etc. The *Mirzas* were also involved in power struggles, since they were anxious to assume power. Akbar's troops were sent into Gujarat against them and in 1572, the Gujarat state was taken over by the Moghuls. However, as soon as the Moghul army returned to Agra, the *Mirzas* rose up in rebellion once more, and the Moghuls were obliged to subdue Gujarat a second time.

The subjugation of Bengal, the Moslem ruler of which declared himself to be independent (though he was considered to be a vassal of Akbar), was to take more than two years. After that there was a pause before any further annexations. Attention was concentrated on matters connected with the internal administration of the enormous empire.

### The Administrative System

The main administrative department in the Moghul state was that concerned with finance. It was headed by the *diwan*. Tax officials were for the most part Hindus. In the army the main quartermaster and treasurer, the *mir-i-bahkshi*—supervised the allocation of *jagirs*, and it was he who inspected the soldiers and their equipment at military parades. Other decisions were taken by the detachments' military commanders. The department in charge of religious affairs was known as the *sadarat*. The main *sadr* appointed judges for

criminal and civil suits of the Moslems and was in charge of the distribution of the *suyurghals*. In the regions and districts civil and military authorities worked side by side; they had to keep a check on each other and combat any manifestations of separatism. In some large regions there were local *sadrs*.

### **The Position of the Peasants**

The population of the Moghul empire consisted of numerous tribes and peoples, who spoke a whole variety of languages, had reached varying levels of social development and were divided by caste barriers and religions. The majority of the population lived in the small narrow world of their village community. The peasants paid rent to the state in the form of land revenue. It was in the government's interests that this tax-cum-rent should be paid regularly, but neither the state, nor the feudal lords interfered in the peasants' affairs.

The state demand was one-third of the produce. In the main this tax was viewed as "just", although at times the peasants were unable to pay it. Then troops were called in to help collect the revenue. In the chronicles there are references to villages of "unruly robbers" where peasants sought shelter behind walls to protect themselves against Akbar's soldiers. Once Akbar himself destroyed a clay wall with his elephant and marched into a village at the head of punitive detachments.

Cultivation of land was declared an obligation to the state and tax collectors were instructed to make quite sure that all arable land was sown. In order to regulate the collection of taxes Akbar decreed that all the land in the central part of his kingdom be measured not with string, which could be arbitrarily slackened or tightened, but with bamboo poles.

The village community in the Moghul empire was a complex body. As collective landowner the community had control over a small territory usually around one village, while the community headman was in charge of the allocation and collection of taxes from the cultivated land within that territory. However the village community artisans and servants had regular clients sometimes in more than one village. Thus every village, practically speaking, had its own *mokhar*—guard and custodian of the fields, while one blacksmith might serve two villages, and one jeweller five, etc. The overall number of craftsmen of various types who would be supplying the needs of a particular rural district would be on an average between seven and twelve. The craftsmen would not as a rule be paid for each article they made, but would be given a share of the harvest for their work or a plot of land that was exempt from taxation. It should be noted that a man from one village community was also allowed to acquire an additional plot of land in a neighbouring settlement (though he did not enjoy full rights there). This makes it difficult to assess the

extent of territory under the individual community's influence; however, the peasants of several villages could acquire the necessary manufactured articles without recourse to the market.

The headman and the scribe were, on the one hand, representatives of the community and, on the other, they were in the service of the state. Provided he collected the full amount of taxes due from his village, the headman could count on a holding equivalent to one-fortieth of all land under cultivation belonging to his community, and this holding would be rent free.

Akbar's substitution of tax in kind by a tax to be paid in money in the central regions of his empire was a heavy burden on the peasants. The Indian peasant, in order to obtain money, was now obliged on his own or with the help of the community's headman to sell his produce on the market and thus became exceedingly dependent on the merchants and money-lenders. Although Akbar lifted a good number of minor taxes, the feudal lords continued to collect them from the peasants and then use such money for their own needs.

Apart from paying taxes, the peasants were also at times obliged to work for the state without payment, mainly building fortresses, cities, etc. This labour was referred to as *begar*. It was particularly hard when a fortress was to be erected in the neighbourhood, for then Akbar would simply give orders for all nearby villages to take part in the construction work.

### State and Private Ownership of Land

Each large state in feudal India strove first and foremost to consolidate its power over the land. The existence of state lands made possible the collection of rents to swell the treasury and also enabled the state to distribute conditional land grants to feudal lords in return for services rendered, the owners of which had to maintain contingents of soldiers, which made up the state army. A strong army made it possible to suppress internal disturbances, protect the state against its neighbours and conquer new territories. However the new feudal lords, having grown more powerful, attempted to transform conditional land grants into their private property. This struggle between the principles of state and private ownership of land continued throughout the whole of the feudal period.

In the Moghul empire there were two forms of state ownership of land—the *khalisa* and the *jagirs*.

All conquered territory became part of the state land fund—the *khalisa*. It was this land that the ruler would distribute as *jagir* estates, and from which he would also make land grants to those authorised to perform the sacred rites and to theologians. The constant fluctuations in the size of the *khalisa* made it impossible to estimate the extent of these lands. The *khalisa* was exclusively state property.

The *jagir* estates were conditional land grants. Their holders were

obliged to maintain detachments of troops, the size of which varied according to the extent of the land grant. These detachments formed the backbone of the ruler's army. The land distributed as *jagirs* continued to be regarded as state property. The size and form of the land revenue were determined not by the *jagirdar* but laid down by the state, which also stipulated how that tax was to be collected; the *jagirdar's* land tenure, as a rule, could not be handed down in the family, and after his death became the property of the treasury. A *jagirdar* might have one estate taken away from him and be given another in its place, which might even be in a different part of the country. During Akbar's reign such transfers were quite frequent as part of his effort to avoid separatist activities; this meant that a *jagirdar* generally did not own one and the same land for more than ten years.

The *jagir* holdings, however, bore a number of traits that were specific to private feudal ownership, since the large *jagirdars* merely spent about a third of the land revenue they collected on their detachments, while those who had been donated smaller estates of this type spent less than a half of the revenue levied. A further feature of Akbar's reign was that the rajas who had submitted to him were usually granted their former lands as *jagirs*, and these could be handed down to descendants. By the seventeenth century the term "hereditary *jagir*" had even taken root.

Usually the *jagirs* were large estates embracing several tens of thousands of acres. During Akbar's reign the *jagirdars* set great store by their rights. When, in the late seventies and the early eighties of the sixteenth century, Akbar attempted to do away with the *jagir* system and introduce salaries in cash instead, the *jagirdars* in the Punjab rose up in protest. The commander of the army, Shahbaz Khan, was obliged to distribute, in the name of Akbar, all the *khalisa* lands in that region as *jagirs*, declaring to the padishah: "If I had not calmed the hearts of the warriors in this way, they would have revolted straightaway. Now both the state and the army uphold you." Insofar as the Moghul empire was only starting to take shape during Akbar's reign, there were only about two thousand *jagirdars* at that time (counting the holders of both large and small *jagirs*).

In the Moghul empire there were also private landowners of the *zamindar* category. During Akbar's reign the powerful and petty princes that had been subdued by him were accorded *zamindar* status after they had acknowledged the rule of the Moghul empire and agreed to pay tribute to Akbar. The size of the tribute would depend upon the real balance of power at the moment of subjugation. The revenue department of the Moghul empire did not interfere in the relations between the *zamindar* and his peasants: the *zamindars* did not exact a land tax as such, but rather rent. The size of this rent and the methods of collection used would be stipulated in accordance with local customs. In the Rajput lands of Orissa, in Bihar, and certain



other places some of the *zamindars* organised their estates on the manorial pattern involving *corvée*, but in the main this form of exploitation was gradually disappearing in India under the Moghuls. The lands of the *zamindars* were officially designated as hereditary, although any new recipient required a charter from his ruler before he could assume possession. However this charter was only of importance if there were several claimants to the land. Besides, the small cultivators were also called *zamindars*, but in the chronicles mention is only made of the *zamindar* princes.

The *suyurghal* estates in the Moghul empire, also referred to as *mulk*, *waqf* or *inam*, were privately owned lands organised on a feudal pattern. For the most part the *suyurghals* were granted to *Sufi* shaikhs and Moslem theologians and in isolated cases to persons of secular calling. In Akbar's reign, as a result of his religious policies, some *suyurghals* were granted to priests of other religions. Usually the *suyurghals* were hereditary holdings of no great size; no obligations were placed upon their owners, apart from the fact that they were expected to say prayers for their ruler. The *suyurghal* holdings accounted for some three per cent of the state lands. It is impossible to estimate the extent of temple lands in the *zamindar* estates.

### Handicrafts

In the village community the craftsman would fashion a required article and receive in exchange a share of the harvest from the community or a small rent-free holding of land. However a large number of craftsmen who lived either in the towns or in settlements of craftsmen worked for feudal lords who gave them commissions or made articles they sold subsequently at the markets.

The most developed sphere of production in India at that time was weaving: cotton and silk fabrics, embroidered and printed fabrics, natural and dyed ones, were all produced on a large scale. In an inventory of Akbar's wardrobe there are references to close on one hundred different types of Indian fabrics.

In Agra there lived large numbers of building workers specialising in various trades, in Gujarat masters of incrustation were to be found and in Bengal skilled shipbuilders. Other crafts were also plied by the Indian population: iron and nonferrous metals were mined, as well as salt and saltpetre, building stone was quarried, paper and items of jewelry were made, vegetable oils were processed and sweetmeats made. The finest articles of Indian craftsmanship had long been admired for their artistry and elaborate workmanship. However, Indian craftsmen worked very slowly, for they used very simple tools, which were, for the most part, made by the craftsmen themselves. Yet at the same time it is known that reeds (the most intricate part of the loom used to space warp yarns evenly) were produced for sale.

This indicates the level of craft manufacture that had been attained.

The artisan castes were dependent on the feudal authorities who appointed the leader of the caste and the broker (*dalal*) who sold their manufactured goods on the market. Craftsmen who worked in state workshops were even more dependent; they produced equipment for the army and also articles for the ruler, which he could distribute among his retainers.

A system of money advances and buying up of wares in bulk was the most widespread form of exploitation to which the craftsmen were subjected by the merchants. The merchants made payments in advance so that manufacturers might have food and be able to buy raw materials, and then the artisan would be obliged to give his wares to precisely that merchant and for a lower price than he might have been able to obtain elsewhere. Along the west coast of India the main types of craft production and trade were subject to taxes, that were farmed out; moreover the farmer of these taxes also had a monopoly of the production of a particular variety of commodity (such as cotton fabrics, betel, unpolished rice, ivory articles, etc.). It would appear that no one would be allowed to sell any of these commodities without obtaining written permission from the tax-farmer, who was usually a rich Indian merchant or the head of the craftsmen belonging to the caste engaged in the particular manufacture concerned.

### Trade and Usury

After conquering Gujarat and Bengal, the Moghul empire had obtained access to the sea, but it was immediately confronted by opposition from the Portuguese; it was necessary to obtain Portuguese licence even when pilgrims sought to travel by the sea route to Mecca. All attempts by the Moghuls to drive the Portuguese out of Diu and Daman—fortified ports in Gujarat—ended in failure. The Moghuls also had to reconcile themselves to the existence of Portuguese ports in Bengal—Satgaon and Hugli. The largest of the Moghul ports was Surat in Gujarat, that had superseded Cambay, now a vestige of its former self, the entrance to which was blocked by Portuguese fortresses situated along both shores of the Gulf of Cambay.

The Moghuls possessed a number of merchant ships, but no fleet of their own. The Portuguese, incidentally, anxious to make the most of the Indian merchants' business experience and long-standing trade links had, ever since the mid-sixteenth century, been engaging the former as partners. This meant that the trading activities of the Indian merchants using sea routes had not come to an end entirely, but were greatly restricted. Gujarat, as before, was trading with the countries of the Persian Gulf, Africa and Arabia, while the Bengalis were carrying on maritime trade, for the most part with Pegu and the Molucca Islands in the East. They also traded with Ceylon, with the

Malabar and Coromandel coasts. The Moghul government, which levied trading tariffs, benefited from this financially, and as a result adopted an ambiguous attitude to the penetration of India by European merchants. It sought to restrict their influence on the one hand, while at the same time granting them trading privileges.

Indian fabrics were held in high esteem throughout the East, and for all the countries of the Indian Ocean and the south seas provided, as it were, a universal commodity. Merchants from other countries came to India to buy both these fabrics and spices, bringing along with them, to the "threshold" of India, foreign commodities. The majority of Indian merchants engaged in bulk-buying of manufactures at home markets and then brought them to the ports; they also took part in the transportation of foreign wares from the ports to the courts of the Indian rulers. The Indian traders who travelled to foreign lands by sea maintained contacts with their compatriots, who had settled there, through their caste network. These trading castes acted as trading companies so to speak: they provided assistance in commercial matters, provided inner-caste credit, etc. In Gujarat, for example, the most influential trading castes were those of the Bohras and Khwajas, who belonged to the Ismaili group of Shiah Moslems.

The obstacles created by the Portuguese for Indian merchants on the seas gave rise to an increase in caravan trade with Persia. The caravan routes that cut right across the country from Bengal to Lahore and from Gujarat to Kashmir, also served to promote internal trade.

Internal trade was in the hands of both powerful merchants, who financed river traffic and caravans, and the small hawkers travelling around from village to village. In the villages bazaars were held regularly. At these bazaars peasants could obtain first and foremost salt or coconuts, iron bars and other articles essential in their day-to-day life. The army was supplied with food by special tribes-cum-castes—the *birinjaras* (or *banjaras*). They travelled in the army's rear with their pack animals—bulls and camels, carrying rice, salt, etc. The *banjaras* could be encountered throughout the south of India.

There were no such rich merchants in the centre of the empire that could be compared with those in the coastal regions. However in the central regions money-lending was a thriving activity. The money-lenders loaned money to army officers, courtiers and peasants, on whom stricter demands for money taxes were made in the central regions of the empire. In Akbar's reign money was lent out at an interest of 2.5 per cent per day (900 per cent annually) which incidentally shows how weak monetary relations were in the village.

Despite the considerable development of commodity-money relations in India, all real power in the country was concentrated in the hands of the feudal lords. The representatives of commercial circles—the merchants and money-lenders—not to mention the

craftsmen and artisans, did not play a real part in the political life of the country, although their interests were taken into account to some extent. Akbar, for instance, took some steps to promote trade: internal toll rates at city gates and ghats were reduced to 1.5 per cent and common measurements and monetary units were introduced throughout the whole of the extensive Moghul state.

### Akbar's Reforms

In 1569, Akbar gave instructions for a new town to be built at Sikri, some twenty kilometres from Agra, where Babur had defeated Rana Sanga. In accordance with orders of the *padishah*, in a few years Akbar's courtiers had built themselves palaces and pavilions in what had once been no more than wide open spaces. A beautiful town of red sandstone came into being that became Akbar's capital and received the name of Fathpur Sikri (the city of victory). At the site of the cell where Shaikh Salim Chishti once lived, who had prophesied the birth of a son to Akbar, a building was erected that much later was rebuilt in white marble and was to become the model for subsequent white-marble palaces and mausoleums built by the Moghuls. When the town had grown it emerged that the water supply was inadequate. For this reason in the eighties Akbar's court abandoned Fathpur Sikri which stands empty to this day. It is a priceless architectural monument and a place of pilgrimage for countless tourists.

When he found himself at the head of an enormous state, Akbar decided that the time was ripe to streamline the whole administrative system. Akbar's subsequent measures were aimed at consolidating the rule of his dynasty and the domination of Moslem feudal lords in India. At the same time he sought to secure the support of the Hindu population by reducing the religious oppression to which they were subjected. This policy gave rise to resistance on the part of Moslem *jagirdars* and shaikhs, who endeavoured to follow a strong line and cruelly suppress all discontent.

In 1574, Akbar, anxious to regulate the relationships between the various sections of the feudal class, introduced a hierarchy of offices (*mansabs*) and distributed to his military commanders *jagirs* according to their ranks (*zats*). However the *jagirdars* found means of obviating the decrees and spent on the upkeep of their detachments less than the sum stipulated by the authorities. Further regulation was required and a new gradation had to be introduced—the *savar*. The *zat* still indicated rank, while the *savar* reflected how many cavalymen a military commander was actually supposed to be maintaining (for example, a commander of a thousand men might be expected to maintain a thousand, five hundred or even as few as four hundred cavalymen). The size of a *jagir* came to depend on the *zat* and *savar*. As a result land grants increased in size and the fund of *khalisa* lands shrank.

Then Akbar had the idea of doing away with the *jagirs* altogether. In 1574, he gave orders for an experimental scheme, to cover three years, as we are told in the chronicles, according to which "all state lands were to become *khalisa* lands and he assigned his military commanders cash salaries". The land revenue was to be collected by *kroris*—officials who themselves had in advance paid an enormous sum by way of security. This measure gave rise to strong resistance on the part of the *jagirdars*, who had been stripped of their land estates, and it also led to impoverishment of the *raiya*s, from whom the new revenue collectors, appointed for three years, took everything they could in order to cover their initial outlays and make as much profit as possible. The reform eventually had to be abolished.

### Akbar's Religious Reforms

Akbar's religious reforms were directed towards the same end as the other changes he introduced, namely, the expansion of the social base of his power. Akbar realised that the Hindus would only serve him loyally if he respected their religious customs. This was why, in 1563, he revoked the tax on Hindu pilgrims and in the following year he also abolished the *jizya*. These taxes were, by all appearances, reintroduced under the influence of Moslem *jagirdars*, but abolished once more at the beginning of the 1580s.

Resistance on the part of orthodox Moslem high officials to Akbar's new religious policy made him doubt the correctness of orthodox Islam doctrine. In 1575, at Fathpur Sikri, a House of Worship (specially designed for discussion of religious matters) was built. Fierce arguments during these deliberations led Akbar to move further and further away from orthodox Islam. A friend and counsellor of Akbar's at this time, among other things on religious questions too, was Abul Fazl. His father, Shaikh Mubarak, had been persecuted for *Mahdism*, and Abul Fazl, when he was a boy, had been obliged to wander about with his father in exile. Abul Fazl himself professed a very liberal form of *Sufism* and came out against the official priesthood, holding that all roads lead to God and that in every religion there is an element of truth. Abul Fazl aroused Akbar's interest both in non-Moslem religions and also in various "heretical" teachings, which at the time were the banner of the people's opposition to feudalism.

Akbar who was sincerely interested in a number of different religions began to acquaint himself with Hindu beliefs and those of the Parsees, Jainas and Christians. At his request three Jesuit missions were sent to him from Goa; the leader of one of them, Monserrate, left notes behind him—the Commentary, that proved of great value to historians. Akbar began to introduce Hindu and Parsee customs at his court.

In 1580, this produced a wide-scale uprising putting Akbar at

considerable risk; the uprising was led by the shaikhs who had issued a *fatwa* or religious behest to the effect that he should be overthrown as a heretic. The uprising was centred in Bengal and the Punjab, where the discontented feudal lords put forward as their candidate for the Moghul throne Akbar's governor in Kabul, Humayun's youngest son by another wife. It was only with difficulty that Akbar succeeded in suppressing this uprising. On returning victorious to Agra, Akbar began to introduce a new religion at court which he gave the name of *Din-i-Ilahi* (Divine Faith). In *Din-i-Ilahi* there were to be joined together what Akbar saw as the reasonable elements of India's main religions. The dominant element of this faith was the glorification of Akbar as the "just ruler" in the spirit of the *Mahdists*, a certain negation of some of the Hindu and to some extent also Moslem rituals and mythology.

This artificially constructed religion won its followers mainly among the poorer sections of the people, while Akbar had counted on it attracting precisely court circles. Although no further uprisings occurred, opposition to Akbar's religious policy from intolerant Moslems continued. This explains why in the last years of his life Akbar began to introduce repressive measures aimed against Moslem religious leaders, to exile shaikhs, who came out against him, to the borderlands of the empire, to shut down some of the mosques, etc. After Akbar's death *Din-i-Ilahi* continued to exist for another half century as a religion of a small sect. However the actual spirit of religious tolerance, and Akbar's aim not to counterpose India's two main religions but rather to search for ways of bringing them together and achieving some sort of synthesis, was to exert a profound influence on Indian society.

### **Social Thought and Popular Movements**

The *Mahdist* movement, to which Shaikh Mubarak adhered and which had influenced the ideas of Abul Fazl, grew up amongst the urban Moslem traders and craftsmen. In the fifteenth century, in Gujarat, a famous scholar by the name of Mir Sayyid Muhammad (1443-1505) declared himself *Mahdi* (i.e. the Messiah). He called on men to return to the democratic principles of early Islam, to restore equal property status among Moslems. In the *Mahdi* community in Gujarat this latter principle was observed strictly: the income of each member would be paid into a common fund and divided up equally among all. Unlike the followers of the *Bhakti* movement the *Mahdists* addressed themselves only to Moslems. They pinned their hopes on the accession of a just ruler, who would follow the precepts of early Islam and put into practice the principles concerning equality within the Moslem community.

During the reign of Islam Shah, Sher Shah's son, the *Mahdists* literally captured the areas of Biana and Hindia in the Doab and

forcibly set up their regime in the town of Biana. The principle of dividing property and incomes was introduced once more in the *Mahdi* community. Besides the urban population the *Mahdists* were joined by *raiya*ts, rural craftsmen and some feudal lords opposed to Islam Shah's rule, including Shaikh Mubarak. Islam Shah replied by repressive measures—he beat one of the leaders to death with sticks, punished another, and persecuted the remainder: by 1549 the movement had been finally suppressed. It revived once again in Delhi and the Punjab in 1573. However this time no uprising developed.

Another unorthodox teaching (relating to the later *Bhakti*) was Sikhism, the founder of which was the *Guru* (teacher and leader) Nanak (1469-1539). During Akbar's reign the Sikhs were confined to the Punjab and the sect consisted of traders and craftsmen. During the time of the fourth *Guru* of the Sikhs, Ramdas (1574-1581), however, the Sikhs obtained land near Amritsar, built a temple there and dug out a holy tank. Through specially appointed functionaries Ramdas made regular collections of offerings and the next *Guru*, Arjan (1581-1606), transformed what had once been voluntary contributions into a tax on each household to be collected from all people living within the district that belonged to the Sikhs. Akbar was favourably disposed towards the Sikhs and is reputed, according to a Sikh legend, to have conversed with *Guru* Ramdas.

In Rajputana the *Bhakt* Dadu (1544-1603) wandered through the Rajput states and called for resignation, meekness and love. According to legend, Dadu was also summoned to speak with Akbar. However, it would seem unlikely that Akbar knew of Tulsi Das, whose very long poem *Ramayana* (1575) was soon known to the whole Hindi-speaking population. Tulsi Das spoke out against caste differences and oppression; he criticised the hypocrisy of the world around him but the only way out in his opinion was mystical union with God in the image of Rama.

Akbar, however, strove resolutely to keep down those sectarian movements, which were directed against the power of the Moghul state. He used all his might to suppress the Moslem sect of the Roshnias, to which a number of Afghan tribes belonged, in particular the Yusufzais. The founder of this movement was Bayazid Ansari (1524-1585); he preached against the Afghan nobles who were starting to organise their estates on feudal lines and also against the oppression the people was subjected to by the Moghul empire. In the years 1585-1600 Akbar sent a number of punitive expeditions against the Roshnias, who had captured the mountain passes linking India and Kabul, but over the years he was to suffer a number of heavy defeats. Eventually Akbar succeeded in putting down the uprisings of the Afghan Roshnias, but after Akbar's death they took up arms once again.

## New Conquests

In the 1580s Akbar again embarked on a policy of conquest, but this time he was concerned with extending the frontiers of what was now a firmly consolidated empire. In 1586, making the most of turbulence as various claimants were contending for the throne, Akbar sent troops to Kashmir and captured it. However in order to maintain his hold over this mountainous country Akbar had to send his army there a second time. In 1589, Akbar annexed Kashmir to his other possessions and introduced a tax in kind (in wool and saffron). The cool climate and beauty of the Kashmiri lakes captured Akbar's heart and Kashmir became the place where he loved to spend his summers.

In 1590, Akbar sent his ward Abudur Rahim, son of Bairam Khan, to conquer Thatta (Sind). The former ruler of Thatta became a courtier of Akbar's. In 1592, Orissa was captured and annexed to the Bengal region, then, in 1595, Akbar conquered Baluchistan and wrested Kandahar from Persia. At the same time the Moghul armies started invading the Deccan. In 1583, they laid siege to Ahmadnagar, the capital of a principality of the same name, the weakest of the Deccan sultanates. And finally, in 1599, the ruler of Ahmadnagar acknowledged himself a vassal of the Moghuls. The greater part of his territory, including Daulatabad, was incorporated into the Moghul empire. After that the Moghul troops under the command of Akbar himself besieged Asirgarh for two years. This extremely strong fortress of the independent principality of Khandesh, that had broken away from Ahmadnagar, surrendered in January 1601. These wars brought out the weakness of the Moghul army, which resulted from a declined fighting spirit of the military commanders. Used by now to a life of luxury, they took with them waggonloads of their personal possessions, thus hampering the army's manoeuvrability, and gave more thoughts to banquets than to military exploits.

In 1605, Akbar died and he was succeeded by Salim, his son, who assumed the title Jahangir. In the last years of Akbar's life, Salim had led a revolt against his father and set himself up as an independent ruler at Allahabad. However during Salim's reign Agra remained the capital.

## THE REIGN OF JAHANGIR

Jahangir's accession, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, marked a certain departure from the policy of religious tolerance that Akbar had proclaimed. This led to discontent among the majority of the Hindu *jagirdars* and some sections of the Moslems. Soon afterwards Jahangir's eldest son, Khusrav, fled to the Punjab, where he led a revolt. Arjan, the fifth *Guru* of the Sikhs, gave him financial aid. Despite this, Khusrav's troops were routed, his supporters put to death and he himself was blinded. Jahangir ordered Arjan Dev to pay



a large fine and when the latter refused, Jahangir had him put to death. From then onwards the Sikhs began actively to oppose the Moghuls.

Jahangir sought to subjugate those parts of India which his father had been unable to conquer. The Rajputs of Mewar found themselves forced to surrender to the armies of the Moghuls in 1614. The son of the raja of Mewar was brought to the court of Jahangir, who treated him with kindness and lavished rich gifts upon him, attempting in this way to win over to his side other independent rulers as well.

The invasion of Assam by Moghul forces ended in a serious defeat for the Moghul army, whose ranks were depleted. The river fleet of the Moghul empire was also destroyed. The siege of the Punjabi fortress at Kangra was begun in 1615 and ended five years later with the Hindus surrendering. Akbar's forces had been forced to abandon a similar attempt in the past and Jahangir celebrated this success as a great victory and gave orders that a mosque be built in the fortress.

Jahangir's last victory in the north of India was the conquest, in 1622, of Kishtwar, a small principality in Kashmir.

Time and again Jahangir came into conflict with the Portuguese who attacked Moghul vessels, and the Moghul *padishah* began to support the rivals of the Portuguese—the British and the Dutch, who just at that time appeared in the Indian Ocean. Dutch and British merchants, unlike the Portuguese, were anxious to penetrate the interior of India and they set up their trading stations in Agra, Dacca, Patna and other centres of craft manufacture. The King of England, James I, even sent an ambassador to the Moghul court, a certain Thomas Roe, so that he might secure privileges for British merchants. Thomas Roe spent three years at the court of Jahangir (1615-1618) and his diary recording details of his life in India has been handed down to posterity.

### **Special Features of Administration in Bengal**

Although Bengal had been conquered during Akbar's reign, Moghul control of that borderland of the empire was not secure. The *zamindars* and *jagirdars* of Bengal were anxious to turn their possessions into independent principalities in their own right. The subjugation of the *zamindars* in Bengal took four years, from 1608 to 1612. The leaders of the Bengali *zamindars*, Musa Khan and Usman Khan, are still revered in India as champions of Bengal's independence.

In Bengal where trade and craftsmanship were highly developed, and where the mountain regions were difficult of access, patterns of sub-vassalage started to develop earlier than in other parts of the empire. The Moghul governor and powerful military commanders made use of the conquered territory as if it were their own, distributed *jagirs*, appointed revenue collectors and other local officials, and farmed out *khalisa*. In Bengal it became a common practice for one

man to combine several offices. The governors of Bengal were to all intents and purposes independent. When Jahangir removed a governor of Bengal from office for his lawless actions, the latter entrenched himself in a fortress near Dacca, and armed force had to be resorted to in order to drive him out.

The wars of the Moghuls had a disastrous effect on the affairs of the peasants. Another scourge of the Bengali *raiya*s was the revenue-farmer, whose activities aroused their indignation. In Cawnpore there broke out a peasant uprising led by Sanatan against the tax collectors and revenue farmers. After seizing the fortress of Rangamati, the peasants found themselves in control of extensive territories. In the end, however, Moghul forces succeeded in driving them out of Rangamati; after that the insurgents entrenched themselves in the fortress of Dhandhama, yet after a prolonged siege this fortress also fell to government troops.

### **Popular Movements: the Roshnias and Sikhs**

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Yusufzais broke with the Roshniya movement, but other Afghan tribes, in particular the Bangashi tribe, continued to support it. The Roshnias combined the desire for freedom from Moghul rule with the peasant dream of equality, of an essentially anti-feudal nature. The Roshnias were led by Ahdad, grandson of Bayazid Ansari. In 1611, he succeeded in taking Kabul, but he was driven out of the town a few days later. Moghul punitive expeditions were often sent to the districts taken over by the Roshnias, with orders to kill any member of the sect they might encounter. With the help of traitors from the Roshniya ranks the Moghuls finally succeeded in crushing the Roshniya camp. The insurgents who remained alive fled to the mountains. After many years of persecution Ahdad was killed in 1626. Other leaders took his place and it was only towards the end of the 1630s that the Roshniya movement was deprived of its leadership and fell into decline.

The Sikhs meanwhile were secretly planning an armed struggle against the Moghuls. *Guru Har Govind* (1606-1638 or 1645) ordained that all Sikhs should arm themselves and be ready for combat. Detachments numbering many thousands rallied to his cause and these were even equipped with artillery. In 1612, Har Govind was summoned to the court of Jahangir. Anxious to maintain his detachments intact, Har Govind joined the service of the Moghuls, secretly training his warriors the while. However he started behaving too independently, and this led to his incarceration that was to last for twelve years.

Between 1628 and 1634, Moghul governors of the Punjab sent out punitive expeditions against the Sikhs on several occasions, yet it proved impossible to suppress them during the first half of the seventeenth century.

## **Wars in the Deccan**

The Moghul rulers of the seventeenth century had not yet lost hope that they would subjugate the whole of Southern India. The main bridgehead for Moghul troops at this time was Gujarat. Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda refused to submit to the Moghuls. These three states were always warring with one another over the territories along their borders, although on rare occasions they concluded alliances with each other for joint resistance to the Moghul armies.

The Moghuls began by attacking the weakest of the Deccan states—Ahmadnagar. However, in the last few years prior to that attack, as a result of the reforms introduced by Malik Ambar, an Ethiopian slave, this state had grown appreciably stronger. In 1614, Malik Ambar reduced the land revenue to one-third of the produce, making it feasible for the peasants, and at the same time he began to enlist Marathas in his army on a wide scale, renowned as they were for their fighting qualities.

In the seventeenth century the Marathas assume a prominent place in Indian history. In the village communities in Maharashtra internal conflicts were coming to a head and the more powerful members of the communities were gradually turning into small-scale feudal lords. The caravan routes leading from the Moghul empire to the west coast went by way of Maratha territory. Commodity-money relations penetrated the Maratha village community at an early stage. Land was for all practical purposes freely to be bought and sold, although officially it was only the rights of community members that could be sold, including their rights to their land holdings.

The Marathas' light cavalry in Ahmadnagar made lightning attacks on detachments of the enemy, drove off supply waggons and inflicted severe losses on the enormous but cumbersome army of the Moghuls. The military campaigns lasted from 1609 to 1620 but still the Moghul troops did not score any new successes. But despite help from Bijapur and Golconda, Ahmadnagar was not in a position to resist any more: the state had been devastated by the passage of large armies through its territory and the population had been sapped of its strength by the lengthy wars. In 1621, Ahmadnagar's capital was captured by the Moghuls. It was stipulated in the peace then concluded that the Moghuls would receive part of the territory of Ahmadnagar. All three Deccan states paid large indemnities. Hostilities were discontinued for almost ten years.

## **The Economy of Gujarat**

The most advanced region of the Moghul empire and its economic centre was Gujarat. Exquisite fabrics were woven there, indigo was produced, hand-made articles fashioned from cornelian, ornamental weapons manufactured, etc. Trade in the interior of the region was

also well developed, agricultural produce and craft articles were sold at the bazaars held daily in most towns and large villages. Still more important for the period was foreign trade. Surat was India's largest port. Ships setting out from it took wares to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea and coasting trade was carried on along the whole of the west coast. Naturally there was a large strata of traders in Gujarat, both Moslems and Hindus.

Apart from the specific trader castes—the Moslem *khwaja* and *bohra* and the Hindu *banjara*, there are also references in contemporary sources to the *banya* or *baqqal* as a general term for Hindu merchants. Some Gujarat merchants were very rich and influential. The Surat merchant Virji Vora (Bohra) was regarded by contemporaries as the richest man on earth. He had trading offices in Ahmadabad, Agra, Burhanpur and later even in Golconda, but his power actually stemmed from his virtual monopoly of Gujarat trade with Malabar. All merchants from Surat had to comply with Virji Vora's wishes, and it was he who fixed the prices to be paid for imported commodities.

Surat also became an important centre for British and Dutch trade with India. European merchants were ousting Indian ones from the sphere of maritime trade. In the struggle against restrictions laid down by the feudal lords and the *padishah*, the Europeans used bribes and threats, thus securing themselves a position more advantageous than that enjoyed by the Indian merchants.

The more powerful Indian merchants strove to co-operate with the Europeans and in their capacity as partners enjoyed their patronage. In Gujarat a group of compradore merchants grew up (i.e. those linked with foreigners). Feudal lords (including members of the *padishah's* family) also took an active part in maritime trade, equipping vessels and selling the Europeans large shipments of Indian wares.

### **Rebellions Led by Shah Jahan and Mahabat Khan**

In recognition of his victory over Ahmadnagar, Jahangir's second son was given the title Shah Jahan (ruler of the world) by his father, and was appointed governor of the rich Gujarat. Jahangir was at that time very much under the influence of his chief wife, Nur Jahan, to whom this inebriated drug-addict was gradually handing over the reins of government. Nur Jahan supported Shahryar, another son of Jahangir's, and this constituted a threat to Shah Jahan's rights to the throne.

Fearful of such an outcome Shah Jahan used the revenues from Gujarat to muster a large army and in 1622 he instigated a rebellion against his father, but he was routed and obliged to flee to Golconda. From there he made his way to Bengal where he won the support of numerous military commanders. On the approaches to Allahabad he

again suffered a defeat. Shah Jahan's attempt to muster an army in Ahmadnagar and drive the Moghuls out of Burhanpur also ended in failure. Shah Jahan was thus forced to submit; Jahangir forgave him, but took back Gujarat, giving him instead a small *jagir* in the Deccan.

The Moghul army which had inflicted numerous defeats on the troops of Shah Jahan was led by Mahabat Khan. He was supported mainly by the Rajputs. Nur Jahan's clique was alarmed by the growing influence Mahabat Khan enjoyed and went out of its way to slander him. Mahabat was summoned to court, where he was given a cold reception. Then Mahabat surrounded the camp of the *padishah* with the help of his soldiers and took him prisoner. For a time he was the virtual ruler of the land.

The Moghul commanders were angered by the sudden prominence of Mahabat's Rajputs. Eventually a simple skirmish between the Moghul and Rajput soldiers developed into a large-scale conflict in which two thousand Rajputs—Mahabat's main source of support—were killed, and Mahabat was forced to seek refuge at the court of Shah Jahan.

In 1627, Jahangir died and Shah Jahan succeeded him. In order to avoid possible uprisings by other claimants to the throne he gave orders for all his immediate relatives to be killed.

#### THE REIGN OF SHAH JAHAN

The court of Shah Jahan surpassed all that had gone before in its wealth and magnificence. In the main cities of the empire splendid buildings were erected in white marble encrusted with semi-precious stones (including the famous Taj Mahal in Agra). All this entailed tremendous expenditures. Although the army now numbered more men, its fighting potential was inferior to what it had been in the past. During its campaigns the numbers of camp-followers and servants greatly exceeded those of the soldiers. In battle it became the custom to rely less on cavalry or infantry than on war elephants that rammed into the ranks of the enemy. This meant that although, on some occasions, the Moghul armies were still scoring victories in the Deccan, in the mountainous Afghan lands, that were impassable for elephants, Shah Jahan was not in a position to secure success.

#### Internal Policies

Almost immediately after Shah Jahan came to the throne he had to carry on a struggle against the insurgent feudal lords. A Bundela raja attempted without success to set himself up as an independent ruler, and was later obliged to submit to Shah Jahan. Later Khan Jahan, one of Jahangir's favourites, also rebelled against his sovereign and went over to the side of Ahmadnagar. But the Moghul troops routed the Ahmadnagar army and Khan Jahan fled to Bundelkhand, where he

was killed by the Bundela raja, who wanted to gain the *padishah's* favour.

The wars in the Deccan and the increase in revenue necessitated by the exhausted treasury led to terrible famine that gripped Gujarat, the Deccan and parts of Golconda. In the war-devastated Deccan it was above all the rural population that suffered, and in Gujarat, the people of the towns. As a result of the famine, according to the chronicles, close on three million people died in Gujarat, including many craftsmen. The British East India Company decided, in view of the demise of so many craftsmen in that area and the resulting decrease in manufactured articles, to set up trading points on the Coromandel coast. They purchased land there on which the port of Madras later grew up.

Only ship-building continued to thrive in Gujarat. Far more ships were being built there. Not only local traders but also the British started buying Gujarat vessels. However, taken all in all, Gujarat was gradually losing its importance as an economic centre. It was being superseded by Bengal where the production of fine fabrics flourished (particularly in Dacca and Patna), together with tobacco and saltpetre production.

In the seventeenth century the Portuguese consolidated their position in Bengal. The thriving town of Hugli was now virtually in their hands. They introduced a tax on tobacco, coerced Indians into becoming Christians, raided coastal villages, taking off the inhabitants to sell abroad as slaves. Back in Jahangir's day an expedition had been sent against the Portuguese. In 1632, Shah Jahan, after a lengthy siege, took the town of Hugli by storm, and four thousand captive Portuguese were dispatched to Agra. Those among the Portuguese who consented to adopt Islam were later set free but the rest were put to death.

### **Wars in the Deccan**

Shah Jahan saw as one of his main tasks the subjugation of the Deccan; he transferred his capital to Burhanpur in order to be nearer to the scene of military action. After the death of Malik Ambar feudal strife flared up once more in Ahmadnagar. Under the influence of certain of his courtiers—fanatical Moslems—the ruler of Ahmadnagar had his Maratha military leaders, who were Hindus, killed. He also threw into prison Fath Khan, son of Malik Ambar. When the Moghul army captured a number of formidable Ahmadnagar fortresses, Fath Khan was released and made the ruler's chief minister. However Fath Khan killed his ruler, went over to the Moghuls and entered their service. This was how Ahmadnagar lost its independence (1632).

Next the Moghuls embarked on conquering Bijapur. The capital of that state was besieged on two occasions, but because of the famine

that set in in the camp of the Moghuls (the impoverished peasants from the surrounding villages were unable to deliver their produce) and also because of differences between the Moghul commanders, the troops eventually retreated.

In 1636, the Moghuls organised further campaigns against the Deccan. The Deccan states were, as before, at feud with each other. Their courts were rife with intrigue and the feudal lords were killing one another while Moghul armies were able to march through those countries leaving devastated towns and villages in their wake. Bijapur and Golconda were unable to put up sufficiently strong resistance; they had to accept the status of vassal states of the Moghul empire and pay their new rulers war indemnities and annual contribution.

Shah Jahan's second son, Aurangzeb, was appointed governor of the Deccan. In order to regulate revenue collection in this devastated country, Aurangzeb's *Diwan* (Head of the Revenue Department), Murshid Quli Khan, introduced a new system of taxation known as the "Murshid Quli Khan *dhara*". Its aim was to attract the *raiyyats* to come and work the deserted lands by means of allocating them money advances known as *takavi*. Low rates of taxation were introduced for irrigated lands; the amount of revenue to be paid was calculated in the course of negotiations between officials and peasants, i.e., the *raiyyat's* ability to pay the revenue was taken into account. Although the feudal lords of the Deccan levied some fourteen additional taxes, apart from the main land revenue, nevertheless Murshid Quli Khan's *dhara* led to a gradual restoration of cultivation in the Deccan.

### Popular Movements

Protest against Moghul rule did not cease, although the chronicles of this period did not record any large-scale popular movements. In the Punjab, the Sikhs continued to assert themselves, despite the three punitive expeditions sent against them by Shah Jahan (1629, 1630, 1631). In Bengal, the armed struggle against the "robbers" continued unremittingly. In the Doab, peasant uprisings took place, and troops were sent out to confront the *raiyyats* in 1629. In 1650, there was an uprising in the same province of the Mewati tribe which then took refuge in the jungle: the ten-thousand-strong Moghul army cut its way through the jungle, burnt down the villages of the Mewatis and took all survivors prisoner.

### Wars and Feuds between the Feudal Lords

Popular uprisings reduced the revenue that went to the state treasury. Golconda did not pay the Moghuls the tribute which it had undertaken to pay in 1636. Meanwhile in view of dwindling Moghul funds the treasury was in desperate need of that money, while Golconda was a rich state. A distinctive feature of the Golconda

economy was that almost all the land revenue and other state levies were farmed out. This system was ruinous both for the peasants and the urban population. However it gave the wealthy members of the population more opportunities to buy themselves office and become important dignitaries of state. The rich Persian merchant Muhammad Sa'id Ardistani, for example, who maintained a large detachment of fighting men in Golconda, captured part of the Carnatic from Vijayanagar and started working the diamond mines there. From this he progressed still further and became the head of the Golconda Revenue Department, or *Mir Jumla*. He went down in history with this title, which he later adopted as his name. After gradually concentrating in his hands all the leading offices of state, Mir Jumla became the virtual ruler of Golconda. By this stage differences had arisen between the Shah of Golconda and his powerful minister as a result of which Mir Jumla secretly went over to the service of the Moghuls.

This led the Shah of Golconda to incarcerate Mir Jumla's son (1656), thus giving Aurangzeb an excuse for invading his realm. Moghul troops forced their way into the capital of Golconda—Bhagnagar (modern Hyderabad) and laid siege to the fortress in which the Shah had locked himself away. The siege lasted two months before the peace was eventually signed making over part of Golconda territory to the Moghuls and exacting large war indemnities from the Golconda people. The plundering of the capital and the heavy burden of tribute made necessary sharp rises in taxation and this defeat marked the beginning of Golconda's economic decline.

After subduing Golconda, Aurangzeb invaded Bijapur supported by Mir Jumla's troops. However at that juncture (1656), Shah Jahan fell gravely ill. Since the right of primogeniture did not exist in India and each son of the *padishah* was equally entitled to the throne, a war of succession now ensued between Shah Jahan's sons. Shah Jahan's favourite had been his eldest son, Dara Shukoh, a highly educated man with a penchant for mysticism. He associated himself with Hindu "holy men", wrote *Sufi* works, and dreamt of joining together Islam and Hinduism. However he had no fighting experience, since Shah Jahan had kept him at court all his life. He was supported by the Hindu Rajputs, who were hoping that, should he come to the throne, there would be a return to Akbar's policy of religious tolerance.

Shah Jahan's second son, Shah Shuja, had for many years been governor of Bengal. After receiving false information to the effect that Shah Jahan had died, he at once had himself crowned and then set out for Agra with his army. Dara Shukoh defeated his troops. But while Dara's army was away in Bengal, Shah Jahan's other sons opposed him, namely Murad, governor of Gujarat, and Aurangzeb, governor of the Deccan. The struggle between the four sons of Shah Jahan continued for more than two years and ended in a victory for Aurangzeb, the intolerant Moslem who was to rule not so much from a position of strength, as by relying on intrigue and cruelty.



## THE REIGN OF AURANGZEB

In the war of succession Aurangzeb was afforded considerable assistance by Mir Jumla. After securing the throne, the perfidious Aurangzeb hastened to remove Mir Jumla, appointing him governor of Bengal. There too, however, Mir Jumla continued to be active. He conquered the neighbouring state of the Ahoms (in Assam). After Mir Jumla's death the people of Assam rose up in arms and drove out the Moghul garrisons from their country.

### **The Economic Development of the Moghul Empire During the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century**

During his long reign (1658-1707) Aurangzeb was continually at war, sending troops now to the north, now to the east, and constantly engaged in suppressing uprisings in various parts of his empire. The number of Moghul troops increased during this period up to 170,000 horsemen and several hundred thousand camp-followers. Yet the fighting potential of the Moghul armies continued to decline. More and more often Aurangzeb was securing victories by means of bribery and not thanks to his skill as a commander. All these measures required great sums of money.

During Aurangzeb's reign the number of officers and civil servants became much greater than during the reign of his father, and by now there was insufficient land for the provision of *jagirs*. The incomes of the *jagirdars* showed a sharp drop, insofar as the treasury was now demanding a whole number of additional levies from them; furthermore many *jagirdars* had been reduced to penury by the continual wars. They were no longer able to maintain the statutory number of horsemen. Sometimes the soldiers were not paid for several years on end, during which time they lived mainly by plundering the civilian population. Ever more often the *jagirs* were being handed down from father to son, although even in the eighteenth century the *jagir* was regarded as a conditional grant, subject to services rendered. As before, the land belonging to a *jagirdar* became the property of the treasury once more upon his death, and final calculations and decisions would be made by the treasury. However, this process could drag on for many years and this resulted in the *jagirdars'* request that payment in money from the treasury be granted them rather than *jagirs*. The government refused to grant this request.

The government, lacking as it did the necessary resources, the *jagirdars*, who were now deprived of most of their incomes, and the army, which for a long time had not been paid properly, were all anxious to improve their position mainly at the expense of the cultivators. While under Akbar the standard land revenue had been a third of the produce, in Aurangzeb's reign it had been risen to a half, and in practice the exactions from the *raiya*t were even greater. The

more the peasants had to pay, the harder it became to collect revenue. In many districts the peasants were no longer in a position to work their holdings and they started abandoning their villages where they had been living and tilling the land for generations. In the chronicles of that period there are many complaints about impoverished and abandoned villages.

Attempts were made to collect the arrears from the remaining peasants and it became a common practice for those to be made to pay for the default of those who had fled. It is not surprising that famine struck first one then another part of the empire. Famine was particularly severe in the Deccan in 1702-1704 when more than two million people died. The only way to lighten the economic position was to lower taxes, so that those who worked the land would receive at least some income from their work. However the government, obliged to find resources in order to cover its military expenses, was not inclined to reduce the tax burden. On the contrary, the feudal lords kept raising the revenue demands from the peasants.

### **Handicrafts and Trade**

In the seventeenth century manufactories continued to develop, especially weaving (as a result of the growing demand for Indian fabrics on European and Asian markets), and also related processes—spinning, cloth-printing, dyeing, etc. The artisan population in the larger villages and towns was growing, especially near the European factories. Madras, for example, had grown from a small village into the trading centre of Southern India and the heart of the weaving industry. It was customary to found the districts where artisans lived and worked in the outskirts of a town; the articles they produced would be bought up by trading agents, who would then dispatch them to the factories. A number of small towns round a large centre would merge, forming, as it were, an economic region. This development of the crafts and the formation of economic centres proceeded unevenly, mostly in coastal areas. A lively trade went on between these coastal centres that made use of coasting navigation.

In her foreign trade India enjoyed a favourable balance, but the resources obtained from it were amassed by the parasitising nobility as luxury articles or locked away in treasure chests, instead of providing a source of primary accumulation.

The significant growth of commodity-money relations in an economic structure dominated by small-scale production inevitably led to the appearance of trading agents buying up merchandise, on whom the artisans grew increasingly dependent. The main form of exploitation was the provision of money advances in return for future production. European factories also made use of these agents. The power of the merchants over “their” craftsmen was so great, that they sometimes would transfer craftsmen from one place to another to suit

their convenience.

In India some of the richer merchants were merging with the ruling class. Not only did the feudal lords use trade to increase their income but the merchants were more than willing to use methods of feudal exploitation to increase their trade profits. Wealthy men sometimes maintained detachments of armed men and assumed *jagirdar* status, while *jagirdars* often owned trading vessels, market stalls and caravanserais, taking an active part in trading activities. When it came to the most valuable commodities produced in the country, a monopoly of these enjoyed by the *padishah* would sometimes be declared, and then special permission was required for their acquisition or sale.

By the end of the seventeenth century, when the power of the central administration was growing weaker, feudal officials and landowners subjected the artisans and traders to additional taxes so as to further their own interests, and created all kinds of obstacles for this section of the population, often coming forth as monopolists of a certain commodity. Insofar as most craftsmen and traders in the Moghul empire were Hindus, they became indignant at the religious persecution they were subjected to under Aurangzeb and the additional poll-tax for non-Moslems (*jizya*) which he had introduced.

### **Aurangzeb's Religious Policy**

Aurangzeb's accession to the throne meant that the more reactionary circles of the *jagirdars* now enjoyed decisive influence at court. This cold, calculating politician was a fanatical Moslem and his victory over Dara Shukoh signified the advent of a policy, which stripped Hindus of their rights, and of a drive to persecute Shiah Moslems. In order to bring the life of the country in accordance with the precepts of Islam, Aurangzeb banned Shiah festivals, the drinking of wine, the playing of music, painting, dancing, the sowing of the drug *bharg*, etc. Between 1665 and 1669, he gave orders for Hindu temples to be destroyed and for mosques to be erected from their debris. Hindus were not allowed to wear any marks of honour, to ride elephants, etc.

The heaviest burden of all was the poll-tax on non-Moslems, or *jizya*, introduced in 1679, that had been abolished by Akbar. This led to popular disturbances in Delhi, Gujarat, Burhanpur, etc. The Marathas, Rajputs and Jats all rose up in protest. The Afghan Moslems also rose up in revolt. This urge to achieve independence and freedom from the Moghul yoke serves to reflect the fact that a number of Indian peoples were showing the first signs of national consciousness. They began to perceive the Moghul state as something alien and oppressive, as something that often offended their religious feelings. The popular movements undermined the power of the Moghul empire.

## The Popular Movement of the Marathas

The unity of the Marathas in their struggle for freedom and independence marked an important stage in their formation as a nation. Long-standing military traditions dating back to their service of the Deccan rulers came in useful for the struggle against the Moghuls. The Maratha people was the driving force behind this struggle. They were convinced that once Moghul power had been swept away they would establish a reign of justice. The preachings of the Maratha *Bhakti* poets exhorted men to take up the struggle. Ram Das (1608-1681), *Guru* of Shivaji, declared: "Everything has been taken away, all that remains is our homeland!"

The first Maratha leader who played a prominent political role in the Deccan was Shahji. Placing his warriors now at the service of Ahmadnagar, now at that of Bijapur, Shahji received conditional land grants in return for this and came to own the *jagirs* of Poona and Mawal. His son, Shivaji, began actively to muster detachments of Maratha warriors, attack small forts belonging to noble Maratha families and capture these thanks as much to intrigue as to military prowess.

Shivaji's growing strength alarmed Bijapur and in 1658 a large force under the command of the elderly Afzal Khan was sent out against the Marathas. Realising that in a narrow gorge his armies could not manoeuvre and the Marathas had the advantage there, Afzal Khan invited Shivaji to come in person to a conference on the summit of a hill which only the two commanders would ascend. Afzal Khan concealed a dagger in his garments, with which he struck Shivaji while pretending to embrace him. But Shivaji was dressed in a coat-of-mail and it protected him from the blow. He, however, while embracing Afzal Khan, pierced his body with iron claws that had been hidden in his sleeves, and then called his warriors who ran up the hill and cut off the head of the Moghul general. The Bijapur army, left without its commander, was soon routed. After that the Marathas started to make incursions into Bijapur, from which they returned with rich booty.

Aurangzeb decided to put an end to the "mountain rats", as he contemptuously used to refer to the Marathas, and he sent against them a force under the command of Shaista Khan who occupied Poona. However, after a sudden night attack launched by Shivaji, Shaista Khan was vanquished and he fled in panic from his camp. His troops retreated. In 1664, Shivaji attacked the unfortified port Surat. His plundering of the merchants' wealth, destruction of dwelling houses and warehouses dealt a severe blow to Gujarat trade as a whole and the Moghul empire itself. Aurangzeb then sent out against Shivaji one of his finest commanders, the Rajput Jai Singh, and Shivaji was forced to submit. In 1665, he signed the Purandhar peace, which made over to the Moghuls his large fortresses and laid down

that Shivaji should serve the Moghuls. Jai Singh persuaded the leader of the Marathas to go to Agra to pay his respects to the emperor, promising him that in this way he would find favour with the *padishah*. However when Shivaji and his son reached the Moghul capital they were arrested. It was only with great difficulty that they succeeded in escaping. After returning to his homeland Shivaji renewed his attacks in 1670. For a second time he plundered Surat, undermining the economic importance of that port, insofar as foreign merchants and even ships began to fear calling in at it.

Bijapur, Berar, Khandesh, Gujarat and the Carnatic were all raided by Shivaji. The light Maratha cavalry was famous for its speed; it would attack isolated detachments of Moghul troops and then disappear like lightning, carrying off its booty. Like all Indian armies of that time Shivaji's consisted of mercenaries, however his troops were paid by the treasury and not by individual commanders. A strict system of military subordination was introduced. Each commander and warrior was assigned a specific rate of pay. During campaigns, however, i.e. for eight months of the year, soldiers and commanders were not given a salary; they were kept at the expense of the rest of the population. Unlike the population of enemy territory, the Maratha peasantry was not supposed to be plundered. In the rainy season, when the army returned home, it was obliged to hand all its booty into the treasury, and the plunder would then be shared out among the fighting men, according to the rate of pay established for the period of the campaigns, while all the rest went to the treasury.

In 1674, Shivaji was solemnly crowned in Poona, having formed a Maratha state independent of the Moghuls and of Bijapur. This gave impetus to the national consciousness of the Marathas who had freed themselves from alien oppressors.

In Maharashtra (the basic Maratha territory) Shivaji collected a comparatively light revenue. He supplemented the treasury with the help of booty and *chauth* (so-called smart money paid by Aurangzeb's governors to ensure themselves against Maratha attacks and amounting to a quarter of the revenue previously paid to the Moghuls by regions that agreed to pay *chauth*). Shivaji turned *chauth* into a regular contribution. In the eighteenth century, an additional levy was introduced, known as *sardeshmukhi*, that represented one-tenth of the total revenue.

In 1677, Shivaji concluded a treaty with Golconda and attacked the Carnatic. In the rear of his army there marched bands of marauders and plunderers, who devastated the lands through which they proceeded. On hearing that the Marathas were approaching, the population of the areas under attack would flee. It was with purely aggressive intentions that the Maratha armies had come, aiming to annex new territory.

Shivaji's companions-in-arms fought for the idea of their people's national and religious liberation, with little thought for material gain:

they would have received far greater remuneration in the service of the Moghuls. However, as they acquired land and power they gradually turned into the usual feudal lords. Shivaji's own son, Sambhaji, was concerned with nothing apart from a free and easy life. After Shivaji's death in 1680, he became the ruler of the Maratha state.

### **Popular Uprisings in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century**

In various parts of the Moghul empire popular uprisings kept flaring up. Yet they varied in character and there was little co-ordination between them, just as the driving forces and motives behind them also varied. While, for example, the majority of the insurgent Jats were peasants, the urban population played an important part in the Sikh movement. While the Marathas, Rajputs and Sikhs attached great importance to their struggle against oppression and defence of their religious beliefs, this latter question was of little concern to the Afghans striving to secure their independence. Indeed, they were Sunnite Moslems just like Aurangzeb. These uprisings ensued as a result of the wakening of the peoples' national consciousness. In the Agra and Delhi regions the Jat peasants rose up, protesting against high taxes. Spurred on by their leader Gokla they built forts in 1669 and blocked off the caravan route from Agra to Delhi. The Jats were not able to oppose the large Moghul army, and were routed despite their heroic resistance. Gokla was subsequently executed in Agra by being quartered.

In 1672, there was an uprising of the Satnami sect ("True Name" sect) in Narnol (situated in the same region). The insurgent Jats were anxious to overthrow Aurangzeb and set up a just regime. This uprising was suppressed by an army of ten thousand men. However Jat uprisings flared up again in the years 1685-1691, and then once more in 1704, this time under the leadership of Chauraman.

There was an endless succession of Afghan uprisings led by the Yusufzais, the Khattaks, or the Afridis. Sometimes in their narrow mountain passes the Afghans succeeded in destroying whole Moghul armies. This was the case in 1667 and 1674. However, then Aurangzeb himself assumed command of his armies and started bribing certain Afghan leaders and fanning feuds between the various Afghan commanders, and by 1676, the unity of the Afghan tribes fell apart. Only Khushhal Khan, an ardent patriot and prominent poet, stood out against the Moghuls and set up an independent state in Khattak territory, which collapsed soon after his death (1689) as a result of internecine struggle. Today too the Afghans revere the memory of Khushhal Khan as a poet and hero.

The Sikhs also continued their bitter struggle against the Moghuls. More and more sections of the Punjabi population joined their ranks.

The ninth *Guru*, Teg Bahadur, rallied them together and built a fortress at Anandapur. The Punjabi peasants also started rallying to his cause. However, he was captured by the Moghuls and executed in Delhi in the year 1675. His son *Guru* Govind reorganised the whole Sikh movement on a military footing. From then on Sikhism was more than just a sectarian religious movement enjoying the support of traders and artisans—it was turning into an anti-feudal ideology of insurgent peasants. Govind proclaimed that the power of the *Guru* would henceforth extend to the whole of the Sikh community (*Khalsa*). The Sikhs were required to renounce former caste or religious allegiances and recognise their affinity only with other Sikhs. Special rules were laid down for the Sikhs which set them unmistakably apart from the Hindus and Moslems. They wore garments of special design, had long hair and used special religious symbols.

These measures enabled *Guru* Govind to turn the Sikh community into a powerful organisation that constituted a serious threat to the power of the Moghuls in the Punjab. The core of the Sikh movement was formed by the Punjabis, but any man from any other part of India was free to join their movement. Govind built a number of forts in the Punjab, signed treaties with the petty *rajas* of the mountainous *zamindars*, yet despite all this he was unable to withstand the onslaught of the Moghul armies. After long and determined resistance Anandapur was taken. Govind was obliged to flee. He wandered the country for a long time and was killed in 1708. However the Sikhs continued their struggle.

Discontent also flared up among the Rajputs, who had always been the might and main of the Moghul troops. In 1678, after the death of the Raja of Marwar, a former high official at Aurangzeb's court, a struggle broke out between the emperor's protégé in the principality and the supporters of the deceased raja's infant son, who was regarded as the figurehead for an uprising against the Moghul oppressors. Aurangzeb sent an army to Marwar. Villages were laid waste, towns plundered, and Hindu shrines desecrated. At this point Raja Singh, ruler of the neighbouring Rajput principality of Mewar, also rose up in revolt. Aurangzeb sent out against him the troops of his son Akbar, but the Rajputs routed Akbar's army and entered into secret negotiations with him promising him their support if he would attempt to overthrow his father. Akbar stirred up a rebellion, but Aurangzeb's cunning enabled him to break up the alliance between his son and the Rajputs. Akbar fled to take refuge with the Marathas.

Aurangzeb concluded a peace with the principality of Mewar, while Marwar continued its struggle against the Moghuls until 1709. The feudal isolation of each of the two largest Rajput principalities stood in the way of their united action. To some extent the struggle against the Rajputs served to weaken the Moghuls; the need to maintain troops in Rajasthan diverted troops that might otherwise have been used into action against the Marathas.

## **The Conquest of Bijapur and Golconda**

Efforts to suppress popular uprisings required large resources. Aurangzeb decided to replenish his treasury and to this end attacked Bijapur. The capital was besieged and the surrounding areas laid waste. The fortress held out for eighteen months, until famine and epidemics finally undermined the morale of the defenders in 1686. After Bijapur surrendered, the Moghul forces plundered and destroyed the whole town, including its water supply system. All that was left of the resplendent capital were ruins, that were engulfed by the jungle. Then came the turn of Golconda. The Moghuls were able to take the fortress only by resorting to bribery of the Golconda commanders (1686), after which Golconda was annexed. Aurangzeb was able, as a result, to seize no end of booty.

This was the period when the Moghul empire was at its greatest. It now incorporated almost the whole of the sub-continent, stretching far south to the rivers Pennor and Tungabhadra, while to the north it embraced Kashmir and the Afghan provinces, including Kabul and Ghazni. Only Kandahar was still in Persian hands.

## **The Development of Feudalism in the Maratha State**

After the death of Shivaji, emergency laws which limited the development of feudalism in the state of the Marathas were no longer observed. The Maratha commanders started retaining a large part of the army's booty, and the property differences between the Maratha officers and ordinary soldiers increased. Sambhaji and his close associates gave far more thought to entertainments than to military affairs. The attempt by the Marathas to seize the island of Janjira (1680-1682), that was ruled over by the Siddi dynasty, ended in failure, as did the attack on the Portuguese port of Chaul in 1683. In 1689, Moghul troops made a surprise attack against Sambhaji's headquarters and he was taken prisoner together with his son Shahu. Maharashtra had fallen once more under the Moghul yoke.

After the fall of the Maratha state, Maratha resistance increased considerably and later developed into a true people's war. Insofar as Shivaji's infant son Rajaram was living in Jinji as the nominal ruler of the Marathas this lent the actions of the Maratha commanders a semblance of legitimacy. However the Maratha troops were gradually beginning to lose their characteristic national identity. Many Marathas were now joining the service of the Moghuls; Moghul soldiers who had not been receiving their due remuneration sometimes deserted to the Marathas in the hope of gaining booty. Feuds started up between the various Maratha commanders, which sometimes developed into bloody clashes. The army ceased to be a united fighting force.

The Moghul army meanwhile continued to combat isolated Maratha



detachments, besieging their forts. Yet even the triumphant capture of Maratha fortresses did little to improve the position of the Moghuls: as soon as the Moghul army left, leaving behind a small garrison, the Marathas would quickly recapture the fortress. To use the vivid phrase of an Indian historian, Aurangzeb's actions were like the trace of a boat making its way down a river: as soon as the boat had passed, the waters closed over once more.

In 1707, when Moghul troops were returning after yet another military campaign to Burhanpur (to which Aurangzeb had transferred his capital back in 1681) the Maratha detachments surrounded the Moghul army. This campaign had been led by Aurangzeb, despite his eighty-nine years, and at this moment he fell ill. His retinue only just had time to get him to Ahmadnagar before he died. Aurangzeb's last letters to his sons were full of bitterness: "Life, so valuable, has gone away for nothing." No resplendent mausoleum was built over his grave near Daulatabad (where his remains were later taken), it contains a simple white marble slab bearing an inscription.

During the reigns of Aurangzeb's successors—Bahadur Shah (1707-1712), Muhammad Shah (1719-1748) and Ahmad Shah (1748-1754)—the Moghul rulers were no more than puppets, powerless protégés of the various rival feudal cliques. Ever new territories of the empire broke away to form independent states, although the fiction of Moghul supremacy was still to some extent upheld.

## INDIAN CULTURE IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

### The Overall Picture

During the reign of Akbar, Indian culture was dominated by a synthesis of elements from the two main cultures—Moslem and Hindu. Hindu elements come clearly to the fore in the buildings of Fathpur Sikri: flat roofs, Hindu ornament in the form of intertwined garlands of flowers, etc.; some cornices were decorated with figures of animals and in one of the palace rooms there was a bas-relief on the wall depicting birds and beasts, which were later hewed away on the orders of Aurangzeb in his strict adherence to the behest in the Koran that no living creatures should be depicted.

In the poetry of the court written in Persian there are found the motifs of religious tolerance, the likening of the poet's beloved to the Hindu god, and the poet's comparison of himself to Brahman, the poetic glorification of the universal love of men for one another. Some poets wrote on themes drawn from the Hindu epics (for example, *Nala and Damayanti* by Faizi, brother of Abul Fazl and one of the leading poets writing in Persian in Akbar's day). Abul Fazl himself, in his book *Ain-i-Akbari* (Statutes of Akbar), written as part of his historical work *Akbar Nama*, but now published separately,

devoted much space to the exposition of the philosophical systems of ancient India, the rights and customs of the Hindus and their mythology. In one of the chapters of that work entitled "Survey of Ten Subas", in a detailed description of each *suba* (or region), he lists information relating to the customs of the Hindu population, their shrines and monuments. Later these tendencies became less prevalent and under Aurangzeb not only fine art and poetry enter a period of decline but even the writing of chronicles, which also failed to meet with approval from this ruler, who was intolerant of almost everything he encountered.

### Literature

Literature at this period was not only something confined to the court. It appeared in many languages and a variety of genres. The most influential form of literature at this period was probably *Bhakti* poetry. In the local languages and to the tunes of folk songs the *Bhaktas* sang their parables or meditations, many of which have been handed down to posterity as folk songs. The *Bhaktas* appealed to men to oppose caste barriers, proclaimed that all men were equal before God and mocked the power of the wealthy, the landowners and religious leaders. However these essentially humanistic ideas were usually expressed in a religious form. The leading *Bhakti* poets were: Tulsi Das (1532-1623), whose *Ramayana*, in various Hindi dialects, was sung at Hindu festivals and became widely known amongst the people; and also poets of the second half of the sixteenth century—Surdas, who lived in Rajputana, the Rajput poetess Mira Bai. Ekanath from Maharashtra, Shankaradeva from Assam, and the Sikh *Gurus*. A famous work of the period is the poem *Chandimangal* by Mukundaram Chakravarti from Bengal, providing a realistic account of the life of Bengal in that period, and in which elements of folklore and fantasy are interwoven. In the seventeenth century the ideas of *Bhakti* are elaborated in the poetry of the Marathas and Sikhs, and become inextricably linked with appeals for struggle.

Court poetry in India was written in the state language, which was not the colloquial language of the people. In the Moghul empire this language was Persian and in the states of the Deccan it was the North Indian language of Urdu. Although traditional Indian themes were used in this poetry too, it began to contain descriptions of the Indian landscape, mode of life, etc., but all the forms and images were more often than not of Tajik and Persian origin. Certain poets writing in this language that was alien to their people nevertheless succeeded in creating truly artistic works. The most popular of the Indian poets writing in Persian were Faizi, particularly when it came to his lyrical writing, and Bedil (1664-1721). Although Bedil took as his main medium *Sufi* allegories, his verse is permeated with profound emotion

and melancholy. He condemned the cruelty of despots oppressing the people. When Persian ceased to be the state language, Bedil was virtually forgotten in his own country, but his verse found a second home in Central Asia. The same fate befell the Deccan poet, Ghawwasi (sixteenth century), writing in Urdu. He is known in Hindustan but people cannot read him in the Deccan.

### History

The historians of India wrote their works using a large amount of sources and often incorporating into their narrative real documents or paraphrases of their contents. Valuable source material for the sixteenth century is provided in Babur's memoirs *Babur Nama* and also Abul Fazl's chronicles *Akbar Nama* and Badauni's *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*; these were followed in the seventeenth century by the reminiscences of the Moghul military commander of Bengal, Mirza Nathan, entitled *Bakharistan-i-Gaibi* (The Missing Country of Spring), the chronicles of Abdul Hamid Lahori entitled *Padshah Nama* and Muhammad Salih Kambu's *Amal-i-Salih* (Labours of Salih). Written during the reign of Aurangzeb, *Muntakhab-ul-Lubab* (Selected Extracts) by Khafi Khan has come down to our days.

### Architecture

More than other forms of art, architecture was dependent upon rich patrons. As the might of the Moghul empire spread, more and more outstanding buildings appeared, in which Moslem motifs were to be found side by side with local Indian traditions. Fathpur Sikri fitted well into the surrounding landscape, its buildings were simple and practical in design. Shah Jahan's reign marked the heyday of rich resplendence in architecture. In Fathpur Sikri, a white marble tomb was erected in honour of Shaikh Salim Chishti. During Shah Jahan's reign fine white marble, encrusted with semi-precious and occasionally even precious stones, became the main decorative material used in architecture, especially in Agra and Delhi. Under Aurangzeb, buildings were initially also erected with costly materials such as the Pearl Mosque or Moti Masjid in Delhi, but later lack of resources forced this ruler to call for simpler buildings. As a result the tomb of Rabiya Daurani, erected over the grave of Aurangzeb's favourite wife, reveals the same overall design as the Taj Mahal, but lacks the graceful proportions of the original. Then again in the tomb at Aurangabad merely the front of the main building is faced with white marble and to a level only just above the height of man. The rest of the building is faced in light sandstone. The minarets of the tomb are made of brick and plastered with *chunam* (a special type of plaster made of powdered shells).

In the Deccan, where the Moslem style of architecture had penetrated from Iran, Central Asia and from Agra and Delhi, elegance

of line, intricacy of ornament and harmonious proportions were the order of the day. In Bengal, on the other hand, the customary architectural style was far from expressive. Both temples and dwelling houses were made of plastered brick, and walls had only rare windows, and then very narrow ones.

### **Painting**

Miniature painting was the predominant genre of this period. The Rajput school of miniature painting established itself in the sixteenth century under the influence of the wall frescoes of Rajasthan; it also represented a continuation of the Jaina miniature tradition. At the court, a Moghul school of miniature painting grew up, a continuation of Persian traditions. Indeed it had been in Persia that this genre had initially come into being, although the miniatures of the Moghul court were more realistic than those of Persia and less stylised. Cross influences between the Rajput and Moghul schools are to be observed. The Moghul miniatures are one-dimensional, volume is conveyed only by brush-strokes, and the perspective consists of three planes, a lower, middle and higher plane. Figures in the middle plane are larger than those in the other two. The artist looked upon buildings as if from above. In the seventeenth century, particularly in the reign of Shah Jahan, European subjects started occasionally to make their way into this miniature painting (for example, the Madonna and Child) and also some European techniques: in certain figures dimension would be conveyed with the help of chiaroscuro. Colours were natural ones, usually of the mineral variety, and they have not faded to this day. In the Deccan, there developed a school of miniature painting of a kind very similar to that found in Agra, but unlike that of the Moghul court it was too detailed. In the eighteenth century traditional styles of painting fell into decline, but in the small Rajput principalities new schools of painting grew up, that came to be known as *pahari* (mountain painting).

### **Popular Entertainments**

In the medieval period various popular festivities took place involving music and dance and based on stories from the heroic myths of the past, particularly those associated with the cult of Vishnu. In Tamil-nad these popular festivities were known as *terakuttu*, in the Carnatic as *yakshagana*, in Andhra as *bidhinatakam*, and in Hindustan as *Ramlila*. Often there found their way into these entertainments (based on stories from the epics) scenes of farce with topical relevance directed against the Moghul oppressors, and later the British, etc. Sometimes these entertainments were even staged in the palaces of feudal lords. Yet in such settings the art of the people would lose its spontaneity and become pretentious.

